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PANEL IN THE CARPENTERS' HALL, LONDON.



# THE DECORATIVE ART OF FRANK BRANGWYN

A STUDY OF THE PROBLEMS OF DECORATION WITH  
SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE WORK OF THIS ARTIST  
By HERBERT FURST, AUTHOR OF 'THE MODERN WOODCUT,'  
ETC. ILLUSTRATED WITH 33 REPRODUCTIONS IN COLOUR  
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FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1924.

*Made and Printed in Great Britain by Messrs. Geo. Gibbons & Co., 49, King St., Leicester.*

*Coloured Illustrations Printed by Messrs. Edmund Evans, London, E.*



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# PREFACE

The trouble and expense to which publishers and printers have gone in order to represent Brangwyn's art worthily needs no mention ; it is obvious. In fairness to the artist, however, it should be pointed out that it is a technical impossibility to do justice to decorations measuring many square yards in reproductions which measure only a few square inches.

In fairness to the writer it should be further pointed out that the book was planned and partly written ten years ago. The war made publication inexpedient. It has since been—in parts—re-written, and was completed two years ago. Difficulties of a technical nature have still further delayed its issue. The artist has meanwhile done a great deal of work, some of it of vast size, and his exhibition at Queen's Gate this year has opened the eyes of the British public to the artist's importance and significance.

These matters have had to pass unnoticed in the following pages.

In such circumstances it is not without regret that I must allow—out of consideration for others—the book to go to press with defects which I am now unable to remedy.

HERBERT FURST

*September 1924.*





THE DECORATIVE ART  
OF FRANK BRANGWYN







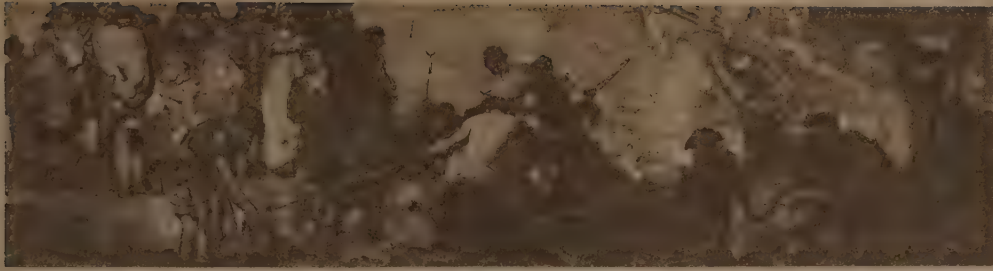




PANEL ORIGINALLY INTENDED FOR THE DE-  
CORATION OF THE SKINNERS' HALL, LONDON.







## I. ART AS AN ORGAN OF HUMAN LIFE

THESE is, in our days more than ever, a great deal of uncertainty about the meaning and use of the term "Art," even when it is confined to the so-called "Fine Arts." The prevalent conception makes it something between a science and a game : people say : "I know nothing about Art," much as they would say : "I know nothing about Chess, or Higher Mathematics "; inferring that the knowledge of Art depends upon the knowledge of arbitrary rules or fixed laws. Then, however, they generally point their apologetic disclaimer with an almost defiantly assertive—"but I know what I like," where, of course, they would not, in the absence of special knowledge, *like* chess or mathematics.

This apparently illogical attitude of the "Man in the Street" is held up to ridicule by the artists, and even more by the cognoscenti and experts who give him to understand that there *are* rules and laws which they have mastered, and which they know how to apply, so that they are able to decide for him what he *ought* to like, and what not. The result is curious : The experts, whilst agreed on one point, namely, that "the Man in the Street" is an ignoramus, are not at all agreed amongst themselves. On the contrary they seek to demolish each other's arguments and to tear their mutual reputations to tatters. Yet layman and expert are at one in this at least, that they regard Art practically as an accumulation of concrete, measureable and tangible things. The conception of art is in both camps, too, almost entirely quantitative : *more* pictures, *more* statues, *more* ornament, *more* decoration—the only point at issue between the two camps being the disputed "quality."

This view of art as a generic term for concrete things is due to a slackness of thought, which appears to be inherent in humanity and which is continually landing it in a quagmire or upon quicksands. It is the confusion of form with function, of the letter with the spirit in such cognate ideas as Religion, State, Labour, Capital, Economy and Art. All these nouns are disguised verbs, they represent functions and activities, not persons or substances. Yet we credit them all with "interests," we feed them and guard them as if they possessed a concrete reality. We believe, for example, that in increasing the number and distribution of Bibles we are propagating Religion. We seek to increase the safety of the State by increasing the number of ships and soldiers. We speak of the interests of Capital and Labour; but here there is a curious further confusion, for whilst the Capitalist would agree that it is desirable to increase his Capital, the "Labourer" would not agree that it is desirable to increase his Labour; what he really desires in common with his arch-enemy the Capitalist is *more* Capital, and both visualise Capital as "Money." So we conceive Economy, that is to say the "not spending of money," as a virtue, and not merely as a suspension of activity, which is in itself neither virtue nor vice.

In conformity with all these misconceptions we regard Art also as denoting substance: the desirable thing *better* art, tends always to become in practice *more* art, more pictures, more statues, more "architecture." It reminds one rather of those naive people who believe that an increased dose of medicine will do them *more* good.

Likewise: to see in Art a balm to be applied generously to the gaping sores of life, or a coat of varnish to gloss over the vulgar substance, is to mistake the effect for the cause; yet that is also a usual conception of Art, which even those who should know better can only define, by another misconception, as an "escape from life."

Tolstoy had a truer view:—

"Art," he says in "What is Art," "is not a pleasure, a solace, or an amusement; Art is a great matter. Art is an organ of human life transmitting man's reasonable perception into feeling. In our age the common religious perception of men is the consciousness of the brotherhood of man—we know that the well-being of man lies in union with his fellow-men. True science should indicate the various methods of applying this consciousness to life. Art should transform this perception into feeling."



But one feels that even Tolstoy's view of Art as "a great matter" is not great enough.

"True Science" is not true science unless it makes knowledge and knowledge *only*, or shall we say: the increase and analysis of experience, its aim. What is done with this increase and analysis of experience is not a matter for Science, but a matter for Art. Science has no concern with the "religious perception, the consciousness of the brotherhood of man"; but it has very much to do with the establishment of the scientific facts, which prove—incidentally—not only the brotherhood of man but the oneness of the universe.

"The destiny of Art," Tolstoy continues, speaking as a true nineteenth century philosopher, "is to transmit from the realm of reason to the realm of feeling the truth, that well-being for men consists in being united together, and to set up in place of the existing reign of force that Kingdom of God, *i.e.*, of Love, which we all recognise to be the highest aim of human life."

"To transmit from the realm of reason to the realm of feeling"; these words of the Russian thinker rather leave on the mind of his present day readers the impression of artists painting pictures, musicians composing music and poets writing plays with a religious moral and a sentimental bias, much as a chemist produces an anæsthetic by scientific synthesis.

But the Artist does not work in that way: Tolstoy has put the cart "science" before the horse "sense." We must put the horse before the cart, only so can it get away with its load: the welfare of humanity. Sense, sensibility, sentiment must be harnessed to reason; but also reason must be moved by sentiment. These together driven by the Will—that is Art. What Tolstoy discerns as "the existing reign of Force" is caused by an attempt of the Will to separate one from the other—to which all the accidents in the life of the individual and his society are due; incompetent Art.

Art, then, is the greatest of all human "organs"—it is neither feeling nor reasoning, but it is what man does with his feeling and his reasoning. Art should regulate *every* human activity; it should be in man's religion as well as in his politics, in his commerce as well as in his industry, and in that thing which we are accustomed to call vaguely by this same name: Art. Only by conceiving the whole of Human life, in contradistinction to the animal and vegetable life of nature, as a work of Art, can we fulfil the promise Nature holds out to us.



"LE ROI AU CHANTIER"—TAPESTRY

Nature makes of individuals "Artists," that is men in an exceptional sense gifted with the power of organic syntheses, men in whom sentiment and rationality are perfectly balanced. These artists are sometimes called Pheidias or Giotto ; sometimes Dante or Shakespeare ; but also Christ, or Buddha ; Aristotle or Darwin.

Nature also makes of individuals minor artists, that is men to whom it is only given to produce smaller, less significant works, but who nevertheless have a share and part in the grander tasks of the Great ; and ultimately indeed there is in all of us somehow, somewhere, this divine gift of producing syntheses, however humble or seemingly remote from art, out of sentiment and reason governed by the will.

The progress of humanity depends on the co-ordination of all these achievements into a living organism, the greatest art of all : the Art of Life—in which we are still such pitiable tyros.

The aim of all art is to produce an organic unity, a whole consisting of parts related to it and to one another through balance, proportion, harmony and rhythm : whether this unity be a picture or a parish, a statue or a state ; and the value, the standard by which such things are to be judged lies not in what they are, not in their form, not in their substance even, but in their functions and activities. A great picture is not to be measured by its size, nor a great empire by its extent : in both there may be much barren waste. Rather must we judge of their greatness by the quickening they give to the life of man.

Seeing that man did not make himself, it would be wrong, however, to credit individuals with the parthenogenetic production of great works of art, or to blame individual societies, or forms of government for the languishing of the Arts. It is of course true that all the arts, but more palpably the Fine Arts, are practised in response to an "inner necessity," a pressure that acting from within seeks expression, which, if you please, you may interpret as the reaction of the soul to the *divine* afflatus ; but this inner necessity is nevertheless the result of external circumstance, acting upon internal constitution.

Coincidences over which the individual has no control give him the chances he needs for the practice of his art, just as coincidences—which are due to chances that may not be as blind as we call them—decide the "culture" of Empires.



The point for humanity to consider is how far it may be able, in future, to control coincidences, in other words to choose the conditions under which it is to develop. What the forces upon which its progress depends are in reality it may not and may never know, but that ignorance is no hindrance ; even as our ignorance of the real essence of the Hertzian waves does not prevent us from using them to our advantage.

If we become in this sense the " masters of our fate " we shall have mastered the great art, the Art of Life—the Art of which the Fine Arts are always a reflection.



## II. THE OLD SPIRIT IN DECORATION

**F**OR some reason, not readily explained, there are not words enough in the language to cover all the concepts of the mind, nor do the words used to define a special concept really always cover it entirely. We lack sadly the word for which the Greek have the beautifully efficient *Kosmos*, which includes order, regularity, arrangement, ornament, grace and discipline, as well as an organic unity such as the universe.

We can only substitute the word decoration as embodying both order and ornament, as well as pleasingness and a sense of fitness withal.

In a general sense decoration is regarded as the embellishment of a thing made for use ; but apart from the fact that the word embellishment begs the question, for it presupposes a definition of beauty, use itself is capable of a very wide definition. Thus, for example, a vase without a pattern is said to be plain, with a coloured line on it, it is said to be decorated, with painted flowers it is supposed to be highly decorated ; yet the vase may by reason of its shape alone make an appeal to our sense of decorative values which the additional and so-called "embellishment" may utterly destroy. Moreover such vases are in many cases not made for use at all, nor are they decorations since they are not necessarily applied to anything—they are self-contained æsthetic units.

Again a room with whitewashed walls would not be called decorated, nevertheless it is more decorated than if the brickwork were left uncovered. When a wall is covered with wall-paper it is supposed to be "decorated," yet the pattern or colour of the wallpaper may offend our sense of "fitness." On the other hand a perfectly plain room may, by reason of its proportions and the position and proportion of its door and window-openings, have a "decorative" effect which subsequent "embellishments" may destroy. The matter becomes even more complicated when pictures are spoken of as *decorative*. What is meant by that probably the artists themselves do not know exactly, nor is it capable of precise definition. We can perhaps get somehow near the meaning if we call to mind the mental springs of

pictorial art as demonstrated by the old Flemish and Italian picture frames.

The Flemish frame is dark and in its earlier form fashioned like a window frame with a sloping sill at its base. The implication is here that the picture is to be regarded as a window "light," *i.e.*, an opening in the wall through which the mind is invited to travel as into a space beyond. The Italian frames are of two orders, in one the frame is definitely a "finish," a border to the picture, which is thus regarded as a decoration on the wall but in virtue of its "finish" self-contained; in the other the frame is an integral part of interior architecture. Here then we have the three uses to which decorations can be put. First an illusional reality, conveying definite information, as who should say: this *is* "Burgomaster Arnulfini and his wife" standing in their room; or this *is* a view of Heaven or of "the Avenue of Middelharnis." The second represents, as it were, a poem in pigments, an emotional effusion of the mind which might centre around Mary, Venus, a Sunset, or a dish of fruit for that matter, or it is the equivalent of the vase we cherish in an almost abstract sense for its shape, feel and colour. The third use makes a true decoration of decorations, that is to say a unity governed in shape, design and colour by its environment.

These distinctions are not clearly marked, they may often run into one another and so produce, as is often the case, especially in modern easel picture art, hybrids, pictures with a dual or even triple nature.

Nevertheless, these three, or really four mental springs form the sources of plastic and pictorial Art. It is important to bear this in mind, not only as showing that Decoration is not merely prompted by a desire to decorate, but also as accounting for many things which present themselves to us as mistakes or offences now against æsthetic, anon against "associative" feeling and thought, despite the fact that they occur in many of the most famous examples of "decoration."

As regards pictorial, compared with plastic decoration, it is not without use to remember that preference for the one or the other was often dictated by economic rather than æsthetic considerations. In Tudor times, for instance, panelling and carving, arras and tapestries were reserved for the embellishment of the principal, and painting for the less important chambers; we know also that carved preceded painted altar pieces; painting was both less costly and less laborious than carving or weaving. There was, however, another more fundamental and significant reason. Plastic art is more real

and in a sense more realistic. If painting ranked below sculpture we must ascribe it to the fact that there is more reality—more genuineness—*i.e.*, less illusion, about a thing that will yield satisfaction not only to the eye but to the sense of touch also.\* The love of concrete Reality which finds expression in the attempted Realism has a very great share in the design of all earlier decorations.

In earlier Christian Art, when mosaic occupied the place of fresco the real tangible and economic values of gold mosaic played a material part in the popularity of this form of decoration—and these values are in fact greater than the value of the design which, in so far as it had to deal with representation of natural form was hardly more than child-like. Yet Realism, the desire for representational accuracy, was always the conscious aim. Even the Masters of the early Renaissance were *within the limits of their conception of Art*, staunch realists; that is to say they strove as best they could and as far as their mediums and tools would let them, to be naturalistic in their representation. This is constantly denied because we notice, even in primitive work, an obedience to certain æsthetic laws and are so inclined to infer that all such art was a conscious æsthetic effort. We find evidence of a general pattern in the arrangement of picture groups and balance of individual figures in such groups, we also find that representation is very much simplified and imagine that this simplification was a conscious choice. Against all this we must remember firstly that what we call æsthetic balance in composition is a natural thing which does not need to be acquired by study; children and savages frequently give evidence of this in their work. Secondly mosaic and fresco painting are media which make simplification of forms and colours incomparably more easy to attain than complexity of form and colour. When the medium changed and the oil technique was introduced side by side with the older media, complexity in colour and form set in also.



\* The sight of an Art (?) lover at Christie's putting his lips sensuously to a piece of "Ming"—he is only testing the glaze—is one of the humours of the sale-room.



This would never have happened had the simplicity been a living æsthetic tradition.

Lastly such æsthetic unrealism as we admire in the early mosaicists and in the Siennese and early Florentine schools, and which Millais, Burne-Jones, Maurice Denis, Melchior Lechter and others have at different times sought to re-introduce was originally not the result of any æsthetic principle. The old Masters were as much bent on being "true to nature" as Apelles, or Ku K'ai Ch'i, or John Singer Sargent. But we cannot believe this, because we are generally under the impression that these old Christian, old Greek or old Chinese masters saw nature as we see it. If our seeing depended on the structure of our eyes only that would, no doubt, be true; but as a matter of demonstrable fact we can with the best eyesight in the world only see as much as our *mind* will permit us to see. The mental regulates the optical focus. The face of nature is thus constantly changing because the mind of those who regard it varies. No two people see things in the same way, and what is true of individuals is true of epochs also. The man to whom a lamb is merely live mutton will note an aspect of this animal which would never occur to the painter of *agnus dei*. Every eye has its individual mental bias, and the same holds good of the group-mind. If we still have any doubt left as to the realistic intention of the older masters, Cennini's recipes for "realism" recorded in the fourteenth century and voicing an old tradition should settle that question, and Leonardo a hundred years later confirms this truth, that whatever other significance might attach to the painter's work, he was primarily concerned with nature-like representation.

This brings us to another point.

When Puvis de Chavannes wished to get inspiration for his decorative paintings he sought it in classic poetry or legend, just as Burne-Jones found it in mediæval literature. When Benozzo Gozzoli in the fifteenth century wished to find material for a classic subject he found it so to speak on his doorstep, down by the river, or round about the loggia dei Lanzi. When an artist of the nineteenth century wanted to paint a Magdalen, penitent or otherwise, he went to Correggio or Giorgione for inspiration, where Gozzoli, or Pinturicchio, Cranach or Grunewald, had they had the misfortune to have been our fathers' contemporaries, would have sought and

found her in their local "Piccadilly," and what is more would have painted her as they saw her.

In other words the old Masters had something more in mind than that which we have since come to regard as Art. They were *after* something different. Their life and times however were permeated with colour and pattern without and with imagination and naiveté within, and so, relying on their æsthetic instincts, and the "tricks of the trade" which they had learnt, they produced things which were *naturally* æsthetic.

On the other hand, when we apply our more rigorous æsthetic tests to the very period which started the bogey of æstheticism, the Renaissance, we find it offending against obvious laws of æsthetic unity; it knew less about "decoration" than ancient Egypt or Assyria. Michelangelo's ceiling in the Sistine is a wonderful feat of composition, but it is not a ceiling; his "Last Judgment" is a wonderful feat of imagination and anatomical knowledge, but it is not a decoration; it has no organic connection either with the ceiling or the rest of the walls. Or take Raphael's "Stanze" and observe how each subject is treated, except for architectural setting, as a thing by itself, with no relation to its neighbour. It was not till the flourishing of the later Baroque style, that artists made their interior decorations into an ensemble of riotous but homogeneous and inter-related parts. In doing this, however, they degraded subject matter into a mere pretext. A divorce of art from life commences, at all events in that respect, for the new æsthetic values are based on the artist's skill in transforming all concrete facts into pictorial illusions, so that one often does not know where architecture and sculpture cease and pictorial illusion begins. The walls become openings, with views into Heaven and Elysian Fields, or Feasts of the Olympians, the ceilings open out perspectively and display similar glories, and we reach the trivial anticlimax of "*putti*" whose painted bodies dangle sculptured legs and arms from the architraves. This orgy of architectural form, these involuted and convoluted curves, spirals, ovals, arches, this revelry in eye-deceiving perspective with its destruction of real and simulation of false architectural features, this degradation of pictorial decoration into æsthetically important, but so far as subject matter went, utterly negligible features was nevertheless the sign of the awakening of a conscious æsthetic sense. It symbolises the advent of man's mastery over his environment. Where in earlier times decoration had

resulted from causes which lay outside æsthetics, when ornamental and decorative additions had gathered around structural parts as iron filings cluster round the poles of a magnet, the Baroque turned decoration in to the purpose of architecture as if it were ashamed to confess that man is so abject and dependent a creature as to have to acknowledge any useful and unæsthetic obligations at all. True, all the values which the intellectual Classics and the emotional Christians held dear, all that had been the inspiration of their art was destroyed in this process, and true also that this Dionysian riot degenerated into bathos, but true nevertheless that without this very bathos the subsequent æsthetic rise of the eighteenth century could not have taken place.

All the errors of taste which the Baroque in its exuberance had committed were noted and corrected by the Rococco. Pomp and Circumstance was replaced by wit and logic, the finer because it was not obvious. High purpose this age had none ; it is therefore a bugbear to the earnest person. Its ideal, for lack of height, was attainable, and it attained it. This ideal was, in one short word, "polish." "Mr. Horace Walpole" characterises it perfectly, if unconsciously, in his dedication of the "Anecdotes of Painting," to "The Right Honourable Mary Lepel, Baroness Dowager of Ickworth," from which I quote. . . "I am forced to pay my debts to your ladyship with Mr. Vertue's coin. If his industry has amassed anything that can amuse one or two of your idle hours, when neither affection, friendship, nor the several duties which you fill with so much ease and dignity have any demands upon you, I shall think his life was well employed ; I am sure my time will have been so if I have made him tolerable company to my Lady Hervey, who has conversed familiarly with the most agreeable persons dead and living of the most polished ages and most polished nations."

"Society," and particularly French Society of the eighteenth century down to the Revolution knew only one heinous crime, *viz.*, the "faux pas," the offence against good taste. It feared of all things nothing more than a scratching of its polish, and a consequent exposure of its true nature. As a direct result of this the styles which go by the names of the two French Monarchs, Louis XV. and XVI. are probably the purest, or rather the completest and most perfect we have ever had in Europe since its beginning. Living was—at all events for the Aristocracy, and they alone counted—a fine



art, and so all the arts became servants and handmaids to the art of living. The polish of life affected everything, whatever the eye saw, the ear heard, the hand touched, the palate tasted, and the tongue gave utterance to was subjected to a process of art. If this attitude towards life did not cause a consistent change in exterior architecture (they dared not touch fundamental structure) it completely revolutionised the interior, affecting not only walls, ceilings and floors, but every single thing within it.

In this period there is no distinction to be made between the Fine and the Applied arts, for the latter were extraordinarily "fine," *i.e.*, complete in themselves, and the former consistently applied. There was not a thing that did not display an exquisite taste, a taste, it is true, that annoys the moralist and nauseates the palate used to robust diet by reason of its cloying sweetness. But that is not the point. Art is a means of expressing life, and it is *good* in proportion to the fulness of its expression. If censure is to be bestowed it must fall upon life and not upon the artists. And in that age, painters, sculptors (who also practised their craft in porcelain) tapestry weavers, cabinetmakers, clockmakers, dressmakers, goldsmiths, gardeners, everyone in short who had the making of anything in hand was either an artist himself or had artists to supply him with designs. The way in which all these arts and crafts hang together, supplement one another in infinite variety yet with consistent homogeneity is truly remarkable.

Characteristic of this period is the subordinate position of the Easel picture and the recognition of the decorative value of empty spaces. In all earlier styles the endeavour had been to cover as much space as possible with ornament or decoration of some kind, either in the shape of carved moulding and panelling, or of arras and tapestry, or mural painting, the "stained cloth," *i.e.*, the easel picture, meantime leading an unattached and doubtful existence against panel and tapestry, destroying the æsthetic value of each as well as its own. In the seventeenth century they did not hesitate, as we see in old prints and paintings, to drive a nail through a piece of priceless tapestry so that a picture in a heavily gilt architectural frame might hang upon it; nor did they scruple to hang pictures upon the frieze and out of the line of sight.

The eighteenth century with its much finer sense of balance and congruity either removed the easel picture altogether to make room for a mirror, or they saw to it that it occupied a fixed position in keeping with



the architectural scheme, often preferring to have pictures other than portraits as *surportes* so that they might enjoy the empty space of wider panelling.

Of course in all this we are thinking of the French styles mainly; in England, though it produced such architects as Kent, and such cabinet-makers as Chippendale, and painters like Hogarth, Reynolds, and Gainsborough, there was little reciprocal relation between the Arts and Crafts. Our serious Academicians would not have *demeaned* themselves as mere decorators; at most one got a design for a stained glass window from a painter, and then this was suitable for anything but stained glass.

The divorce between easel picture painter and the decorator once established, remained. The easel picture painter, even though his "Histories" were too large to be anything else but "wall-paintings," henceforward called himself an artist, and the artist who dared to undertake any of the other branches of art was looked down upon as a *mere* decorator. The sculptor so long as he made sculpture that could not possibly form an integral part of masonry was likewise an artist.

As a consequence we have, since the end of the Louis era in Europe generally, and down to the Morris era, three distinct branches of Art: Architecture, High Art, (*i.e.*, Sculpture and Easel picture painting) and Decoration.

Architecture, after the bold experiments in æsthetics of the Continental Jesuit style relapsed into sober and erudite adaptation of the Roman, the Greek, the Palladian styles, interrupted by a Gothic revival in the Victorian era.

Sculpture, architecturally negligible, likewise obsessed with "Classicism" and besides under the influence of pictorial art has, after the occasionally great Houdon, no laurels to show until we get down to Rodin, and he deserves them more for his picturesque than his sculpturesque qualities.

Painting alone bristles with names of great artists: great easel-picture painters and draughtsmen who from Turner onwards need in that respect fear no comparison with the masters of the Renaissance. Nevertheless they were all specialists; it is always only in one division or even in a sub-division, such as water-colour drawing or etching, in which they excel, to which they devote all their talents and in which they exhaust it. Boucher was really the last of the "Masters" in the old master sense, since he applied his art to every form of decoration.

As to Interior Decoration, the Adam Brothers, basing themselves mainly on the fashionable neo-classic style, had in the last half of the eighteenth century produced something a little more "chaste" than the concurrent or succeeding French style, something in which much emphasis was laid on the decorative value of blank spaces. But it had two defects: it made incongruous use of oil-paintings for scrappy wall and ceiling ornamentation, which, since they could not be whitewashed, very soon became no more than dark and dirty patches; the more serious defect however was the separation between the *moveables* and the rest of the room. However good Chippendale, Sheraton and Hepplewhite furniture was in itself, and however carefully the Adam Brothers themselves tried to keep up a unity by ornamental "motif," Mahogany destroyed the organic unity. This wood was never used extensively for panelling, but stared at best in darkness out of white or palely tinted walls. There was no natural connection between the walls of a room and the things in it, such as had been the case during all earlier periods, where it was due to the recurrence of the same materials and colours in wood, tapestry, gilding on walls and furniture and floors.

Mural painting was, however, taken up once more at the beginning of the nineteenth century by a number of German painters—Kaulbach, Cornelius and others, who tried to recapture the spirit of Raphael, but although their work showed a truer understanding of mural decoration than the attempts of their successors, it had also the weakness of all art that buys its principles on credit, as it were.

The patronage of the Arts and its inspiration had at first come from "the Church," an international and spiritual community; next from more or less Machiavellian princes; next from a National "state" hardly distinguishable from a person—Louis XIV.; next the patronage descended to a national aristocracy. But then the Revolution and with it the "free" individual arrived and patronage vanished.

The nineteenth century, with its emphasis on "Liberty" and its doctrine of individual rights, which favoured the cultivation of easel-picture painting, water-colour drawing, engraving and such-like art, was inimical to subordination of parts to a whole, so necessary in decoration. It valued instead individual facts. Such an one was for example the gilt picture frame which was and still is recognised as the most suitable manner of

distinguishing a picture. The glittering gold, the heavy carving in Louis XIV. or any other "period" pattern, is however entirely incongruous in a room without gilded or otherwise corresponding architectural woodwork and furniture, because it destroys the possibility of making the picture a part of a decorative scheme and in addition generally also overwhelms and so destroys the values of the picture itself.

A faith in formulæ and resentment against classicism as a symbol of Napoleonic-Latino-French tyranny caused, towards the middle of the century, a veritable Gothic fury—in architecture—and worse still in furniture; everything was gothicised, but instead of unity it brought incongruity and in consequence tedium into decoration. Pictures to fit into this "style" had to be illustrative of the age of chivalry, which was as foreign to the spirit of the times as the age of Pericles. Decoration in fact became a question of erudite and literary association.

Thus pictorial art, and architecture—and even sculpture were each rent in twain. Artists were either Gothicists, *i.e.*, Romantic, anecdotal and literary, or they were Realists, *i.e.*, concerned with the subject or the technical problems of naturalistic representation; the Architects either pursued the "orders" of traditional architecture or occupied themselves with the utilitarian problems of their craft. Decoration thus was given no chance; falling as it did between the stools of literary romanticism and traditionalism on the one hand, and "economic" considerations on the other.

It was Whistler, himself somewhat precariously straddling the steeds of Fact (*i.e.*, atmospheric Depth) and Fiction (*i.e.*, decorative Flatness) in his paintings, who first felt the æsthetic incongruity and anarchy prevailing in the decoration of this period. His "Peacock Room" is his attempt to introduce æsthetic order into interior decoration. This attempt was by no means a carefully pre-considered scheme; the architectural features of Mr. Leyland's room were not of Whistler's design, the Spanish leather which formed part of it not of Whistler's choosing; nor was his "Princesse du Pays de Porcelaine" originally conceived by him as a "decorative picture." "That the scheme was one that Whistler had long contemplated seems more than doubtful . . . more probably the idea came to Whistler gradually, as a result of the experiments he had made in harmonizing his picture with Jekyll's decorations—which latter it should be explained consisted of 'elaborate shelving for the display of Mr. Leyland's Oriental China.'"\*

\* "The Peacock Room," painted for Mr. F. R. Leyland by James McNeill Whistler, removed in its entirety from the late owner's residence and exhibited at Messrs. Obach's Galleries—June, 1904. Prefatory note by C.J.H. (Sir Charles Holmes).



Whistler, however, succeeded in making Mr. Leyland's dining room a logical scheme dominated by Whistler's picture over the mantel-piece, round which all the rest of the architecture, together with the oriental china, ranged itself, the whole forming by means of Whistler's gold "Peacock" decoration a single æsthetic unit, for the enjoyment of which only the eye, and not as in William Morris's scheme mainly the mind was required.

It is characteristic of the period, which emphasised individuality, that in this peacock-room everything was subordinated to an easel-picture, so that instead of having a picture to decorate a room we get a room designed ultimately to decorate a picture. It is, however, a proof of Whistler's incorruptibility as an artist that in the process of turning Mr. Leyland's room into a "work of art," he disciplined "priceless" Spanish leather, and an equally valuable "oriental carpet" into subservience to his purpose. He lightened the leather here and there with touches of yellow, and the red border of the carpet was "ruthlessly cut off, in order that it might not *reducé*, by contrast, the touches of red in the picture."

Disregard of false economical and irrelevant associative values could go no further; it is the vandalism of the true artist, who is faced with the problem of fashioning given material into a work of art. It is nevertheless a make-shift only; it is making the best of a bad job. The better job would have been to have had both interior architecture and decorations especially designed to suit the purpose; but in that case the artist would have found himself a rather different the purpose of a neither the dis- however beauti- bition of China,

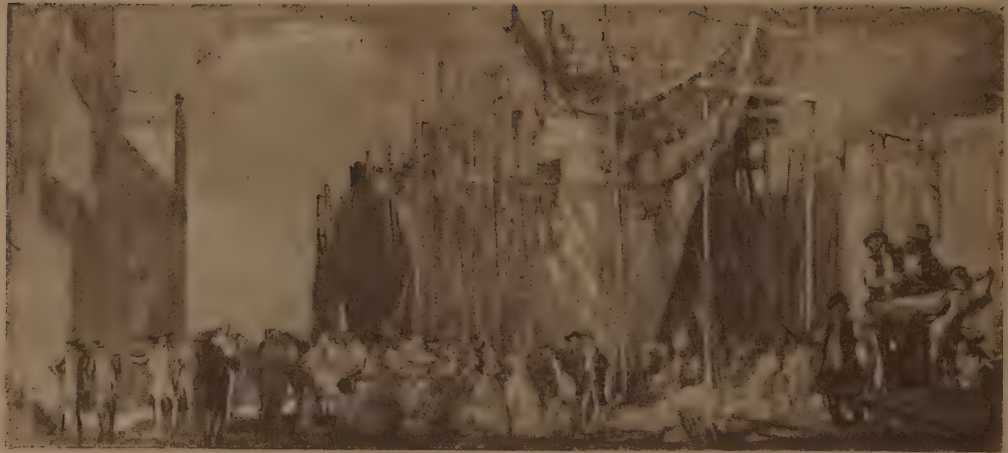
Before we enter into these matters let us note for the moment that Whistler's "Peacock Room" of 1877 is the first inkling we get of a new attitude towards the psychic significance of decoration. It makes it the true



confronted with problem, since dining-room is play of a picture, ful, nor the exhibit- however rare.

enter more fully let us note for Whistler's "Peacock Room" of 1877 is the first a new attitude towards the psychic significance of decoration which Master-Craft.





### III. THE NEW SPIRIT IN DECORATION

**I**N his Peacock-room, Whistler, as we have seen, brought the architectural and decorative elements, albeit forcibly into such co-ordination that they were together subordinated to his Picture, so that the whole room with all its contents formed a single æsthetic unit. The bonds of this union were neither architectural nor stylistic, the elements even of Whistler's mural decorations were not replicas of traditional ornament; the dominant principle was indeed not Form but Colour—or, more accurately, "Tone."

Now Whistler was an Impressionist—with a difference certainly—but still his whole outlook was tinged by impressionist theories, and it is to this school that we owe our new attitude towards the nature and principles of Decoration, using this term in its widest possible sense as comprising picture-making as well as the other fine and applied arts.

Changes are never complete and absolute; the old goes, but it is a long time going; the new comes, but it is a long time coming, and of all that has gone before *semper aliquid haeret*—both internally or organically and externally; that is to say, not only is there much of its parents in the child, but also much form and tradition that have lost meaning and function survive, even as the buttons on the sleeve of a man's coat.

Once that is understood we may say that our attitude towards the form and function of Fine Art has through the school of Impressionism undergone a radical change.

Until the end of the eighteenth century there was only the Classic and the Gothic *taste* ; the Italian and the Flemish schools. Argenson, writing in 1762, does not mention Hogarth nor Reynolds but includes Lely, Kneller, together with Dobson and Thornhill as "Anglois" in the "*Ecole de Flandre*."

The conscious innovator, the unconscious Founder of the modern Movement, was John Constable. Constable has nothing to do with Classic Taste or Italian manner, if a little with the Flemish. Constable's art contains the elements of impressionism and the essence of impressionism is its recognition of the fact that the only reality of Art is appearance ; that is to say, neither subject matter nor stylistic tradition are the criteria of art, only surface treatment counts. Before Constable—if we except Chardin—painters had drawn an outline, and outline had been the touchstone of correctness. The favourite expression of the critic of these days was "*correct*." Drawing was analytic and intellectual; with Constable and the School of French impressionism that developed out of his technique drawing became synthetic—that is to say the form of an object was influenced by the other objects with which it was put together. Empirical in Constable the technique became scientific and therefore objective—but not philosophic as the Classic or Academic standpoint was. Ingres, the academic painter regarded the line as a proof of probity in design ; the Impressionists—recognising that the line is a convention which has no *optic* existence, broke its sovereignty. With the revolution in technique which this attitude brought about we are here not concerned ; the point to be noted is this : bereft of outline, a figure, an object in a picture has no individuality except that which its environment gives it. Thus the picture became in a peculiar and very definite manner an organic unity. From a fragment of Raphael's "School of Athens" one might form a pretty fair estimate of this painter's achievement ; from a fragment of Constable's "Valley Farm" or of Monet's "Haystacks" one could deduce very little or nothing. Yet in impressionist pictures a few splashes of colour without any contour lines will produce a perfect illusion of reality. Presently these impressionists made it clear that local colour is modified by light and environment and therefore inconstant.

"Flesh tints" formerly a fixed formula of yellow, red and white might now be green, or scarlet; shadows formerly grey might now be painted with violet, the blue sky might be rendered with greys, pinks and greens; figures might be represented minus a leg or a body, or a nose if, perchance, the incidence of light or shade made them invisible to the eye. Visual accuracy made physiological facts purely relative. But relative to what? To Truth? The Artist discovered that this Truth depended ultimately on his own choice, for by moving his view-point he could bring into the line of vision different visual facts. An eye invisible at a distance became clearly distinguishable at close quarters, a tree which at close range displayed every leaf, swam at a distance into a mass of green planes reflecting light at different angles. The Artist became aware of the arbitrariness of vision and began to explore this newly-gained freedom in representation. After all art was not essentially impression but expression. The artist had made himself the slave of the fleeting moment, and found eventually in the photographic camera a more nimble rival. He now saw that it could not be the mission of art to defeat itself in a hopeless contest with mechanics.

Meantime, however, he had discovered that one could produce effects without the use of traditional line and conventional colour, and if photography had been his enemy in one direction it had been his friend in another; the comparative study of art which photography facilitated and encouraged opened his eyes to the significance of the work that had been done in other countries and in other ages. Commerce and travel brought him face to face with actual works. The Italian and the Flemish manner fell into their places as single manifestations in a world of a thousand others.

And so the artist became aware of a psychological significance of art, such as he never dreamt of before; and the realisation of this significance constitutes the basis of the radical change that is taking place in our outlook.

The effect that Whistler aimed at was fundamentally psychologic. In making of the Peacock room an æsthetic unit and especially in destroying Turkey carpets and Spanish leather in the process, he proved that his standard differed completely from that of the older cognoscenti; he wanted to create a definite psychological effect of Beauty.

We have since developed this aim and the means by which it can be attained further.

To the man in the street the change is not so obvious, nor have I the space here to trace its evolution further, except to point out one branch of art in which its result is obvious to everyone—Theatre Craft. In the new stage-art, sound and light and form and colour are so organised and synthetised as to present a complex psychological unity of which poetry, music, miming, dancing, architectural, sculptural, and pictorial elements form integral parts. In this craft the *Decor* is not based on æsthetic Tradition, nor on Realism, but on practical æsthetic experience, derived from the practice of Impressionism. This experience enables us to make use of it to produce and reproduce whatever effect is required for a new, free and inventive synthesis.

In theatrical Decor, no more than in the special branches of pictorial and sculptural art, is it the aim to be realistic or traditional, but rather to create by means of art any given or desired psychological effect on the mind, the more intense because it is above actual realism and above obsolete tradition. That is the new discovery in Art.





## IV. ÆSTHETIC UNITY AND THE ÆSTHETIC UNIT

ONE may define the purpose of decoration—using this term in its widest sense to include not only ornament but design and construction also—as the creation of an æsthetic Unity of definite psychological significance. No one, for instance, can miss the psychological significance that was desired and achieved by the builders of Gothic Churches. Here the very construction, with its elimination of the heavy material horizontal, in favour of the light and leaping verticals, which express spiritual aspiration, contrast significantly with the entirely profane and material purpose of the American sky-scraper. In this latter species of architecture the vertical is merely the result of a long number of superimposed horizontals which have no relation to height and certainly none to spiritual aspirations.

For practical purposes the first essential of good “decorative” construction is clearness in the artist’s mind as to the nature of his “æsthetic unit.” Where such clearness exists, and is allowed to find expression—which is nowadays not often the case—we are in the presence of a true work of art, whether it be a painting or a garden city—a fountain or a finger ring. In the sky-scraper the question of æsthetic unity is scarcely considered, the colossal height of the building is merely the result of financial pressure ; we must not allow ourselves to be carried off our feet in admiration through the greatness of the mass of masonry which is always impressive, nor perchance by the superadded architectural features or tricks of artificial night-lighting\* which are not organic results of construction.

The sky-scraper, however, is only one example of “decorations” which have missed their mark ; modern conditions are responsible for others without number. Gilbert’s fountain in Piccadilly is a case in point. As it stands and where it stands it looks like a “breloque,” a seal dropt, haphazard, amongst the traffic from the fob-chain of Brobdignagian Beau. It has no relation to the “Circus,” which is not a circus, but one of the

\* Compare the New York “Bush Terminal” and Selfridge’s in London.

slovenliest pieces of "Townplanning" in Christendom. For this miscarriage of æsthetics Gilbert who designed the Fountain will have to bear the blame. Yet it was not his fault. Gilbert, one of the best "sculptors" of the British School, is certainly a modeller, a Cellinesque "goldsmith" and therefore temperamentally not the fittest man for a job that demanded calm, static architectural qualities rather than elegance. Nevertheless Gilbert is an artist, and a very considerable one indeed, and the bungling inefficiency of the authorities under whose control he was fated to work and by whose decisions he was forced to abide, well-nigh broke his spirit. They built or planned the "Circus" badly, they forced the artist to place his work in the wrong position and finally compelled him to alter his design so that it might meet certain bureaucratic requirements.

Gilbert's experience is a common one and ultimately due to the fact that the bases of modern society are unsuited to public art—at all events in this country—so that even when an artist is conscious of his task, and understands that his work is an integral part of a greater unit, circumstances will not permit him to realise his ideas. But on the other hand few artists seem to understand the importance of æsthetic unity, which becomes more and more difficult to realise.

Æsthetic unity was formerly often the result of accident, of circumstance, of nature. When the material at hand, for example, is taken straight from nature and with the aid of simple tools and manipulations has undergone a process of art, and finally re-appears once more in its native environment, as happens not only with carved stones, but with buildings, and in fact whole villages or towns, then the co-ordination of parts and the subordination of these to a greater whole, is a purely natural process. A similar effect of unity may often also arise from the æsthetic relationship of the different materials used in the making of smaller and individual works of art. Combinations of woods and metals, of clay and basket work, of shells or bone, in addition the few primary colours due to the limited knowledge of colour making, and the automatic creation of pattern owing to the very nature of the material and the manufacturing process, and consequent association of ideas—all these things are conducive to æsthetic unity.

Again where the mental range of the "artist" is as subconscious as a child's, or where his mental orbit is substantially identical with that of the rest of the people there the unconsciousness of the worker or the identity of

mental and psychological interests in artist and public, preserves the æsthetic unity without any special and conscious effort on the artist's part. In other words there are conditions in which the artist cannot help being an artist, where artistic expression is as simple as song, and æsthetic unity as natural as the unity of a bee hive.

But under modern conditions, with the enormous confluence of ideas and materials in the different centres of civilisation, and the vast, consequent irradiation from these centres, the dangers to æsthetic unity increase as the mental horizon widens and the mechanical limitations diminish.

The conception of an æsthetic unity, formerly to a great extent natural and subconscious can to-day only be realised by an effort of the imagination and by a conscious application of logic.

A "classic" town hall in the indifferent midst of English brick and stucco, a Roman "Capitol" amongst American sky-scrapers, factory chimneys, suspension bridges and overhead railways, can manifestly only be judged as individual æsthetic units; yet the very fact that these buildings are Town halls and Government offices, that is to say centres of citizenship, proves that they ought not to be *separate* things; the æsthetic unit of which they form part is the whole city, so that their architecture should summarize the rest and not stand out from it as something different.

That is one case. Here is another at the lesser end of the scale; a picture of a peasant girl or a village inn framed in the heavy "Louis" frames such as dealers and even "Academies" favour is a flagrant breach of æsthetic unity. A picture frame of that kind is fundamentally, as already pointed out, a part of the interior architecture—its "unit" is therefore the room and not the picture; but even were we to overlook this, there still remains the fact that the "Louis frame" contradicts the peasant subjects, was never intended for such things; the Great Louis hated the very sight of such pictures, such "*magots*" as he called them.

The æsthetic unit of a woman's frock is the woman, not the frock; so also the æsthetic unit of a man's house is the man, and not the furniture. Yet we have women who spoil whatever chances they may have of looking beautiful by "beautiful" but unsuitable clothes; and we have millionaires and financiers who ruin whatever reputations they might preserve as good citizens by living in surroundings which for very unfitness cast doubts upon their integrity.



As one more instance of the relevance of æsthetic unity : The unit of a portrait is not the picture but either the sitter or the room in which the picture is to hang—it all depends. The artist must either subordinate all the elements of his painting to the personality of the sitter, or to the architecture and furniture of the room. Yet we are becoming more and more used to regard neither portrait nor the room as the unit, but—the Painter ; we display a Rembrandt, a Reynolds, a Sargent, or an Orpen, but are not prepared to treat them with the respect with which the artist of the “ Peacock Room ” treated his own work : we jumble our pictures together and make them destroy their individual unity.

All this may sound obvious and even trivial ; it is nevertheless of fundamental importance.

“ To appreciate the beauty of a creature,” says Professor J. A. Thomson, speaking of Animal beauty, “ it is often necessary to see it in its appropriate setting ; but this is no unreasonable condition, since the scientific as well as the artistic unity is *Organism and Environment together*.”

This is an axiomatic truth, but let us consider how its artistic application works out :

The “ environment ” of most modern works of art is—in the *creative* sense—purely individualistic ; that is to say : the artist creates his work as an integral part of his Ego-unit ; he does not consider the wider social unit of which this ego—this organism itself—only forms part. On the other hand, the “ environment ” of the artist’s patrons, be they individual buyers or civic authorities is, on the whole, purely commercial, that is to say, the collector surrounds himself with “ dollars ” in the shape of his “ investments ” in pictures, statuettes, china, or what not ; whilst the representatives of the community are prompted by very similar considerations in giving commissions to artists. In confirmation of this let me quote a characteristic passage from the report of a Committee to the Governor and General assembly of an American State. The Committee compares its newly erected “ Capitol ” with those of other States and says :

“ But we feel assured that not one of these (others) . . . has gotten more for the money expended.” It then goes on to mention “ with pardonable pride ” that the “ work was done at unusually low cost at the time, most of the large contractors, it is claimed, losing money on their investments.”



The inference of the first sentence is that with more expenditure of money they might have "gotten" more Art—a palpable and very naïve *non sequitur*. The inference of the second sentence is, however, still more naïve and astounding, for here the Committee are apparently congratulating themselves because they have done certain individuals out of the just reward for their services. The source of this "pardonable pride" is, I confess, somewhat puzzling to me, but one thing the whole attitude of the Committee makes abundantly clear; the "environment" of the æsthetic organism, the Unit of which the building forms part, is not "Capitol" but "capital."

The confinement of the artist's vision to the purely personal "environment" of his mentality which causes him to be satisfied with art as "self-expression" on the one hand; and on the other the almost unquestioned supremacy of the economic "environment," or "complex" as the psycho-analyst would say, in the mind of the artist's actual or potential employers, are the greatest hindrances to the true conception and proper recognition of the æsthetic Unit, and the proper organisation of the æsthetic Unity.



## V. SOME PRACTICAL PROBLEMS OF DECORATION

**W**HERE the Artist has not a free hand, where the organisation of an æsthetic unit is not from the start in the hands of the Artist, there he must of necessity accept the unit as it stands and seek to create his own unity within its limits and limitations. When for instance a painter or a group of artists is commissioned to apply pictorial decoration to an already existing building, the building such as it is, must be regarded as the æsthetic unit ; that is to say the nature, design, composition and colour, indeed the whole character of the paintings is predetermined by the architectural environment. It is not for them to create *individual* works of art, each to be judged by its own intrinsic merit, but to cover the walls in such a manner with pigments that the covering will produce a decorative effect of the right psychological significance.

In theory this sounds obvious and easy, experience nevertheless proves that—under modern conditions—it is but rarely achieved. We will rule out the financial aspect of the difficulty, though very often the artist is one of those afore-mentioned “ contractors ” who lose on their “ investment,” *i.e.*, their work ; who do not get anything like a fair reward for their labour, which latter is, especially in the case of mural decorations, generally far greater than their remuneration.

Apart from this financial problem, the difficulty begins with the social conditions of to-day. Our social order is, despite signs of coming changes, individualistic ; we lack the co-operative spirit, except in the direction of economic interests. Consequently the artist is himself individualistic ; the idea that he should subordinate his ego to other interests hardly appeals to him ; he wants to show the public what *he* can do, never mind the rest.

But supposing he is prepared to subordinate himself entirely to the organic necessities of the object he is to decorate, even then his problem is far from easy. Take, for example, the case of church decoration. A modern church is usually a building erected upon foundations of design

that have their origin in the Renaissance, the Middle Ages or even in Classic antiquity. If he is to interpret the spirit of the Architecture he must be false, not only to the spirit of our times, but, what is a much greater disaster—to the spirit of Religion also. "The Church" is either the shrine of a living Truth or it is a decaying sound-box for the performance of lip-service. In the latter case it does, of course, not matter very much what the artist does.

Regarded as a living truth, however, it belongs to the day. It should be as "modern" as possible. Time there was when mosaic was a "new-fangled" notion, when the pointed arch was "revolutionary," and the stained glass window "ultra-modern." If we have associated such things with the essentials of Christian architecture it is only because we are for ever confounding the letter with the spirit, and turning vital form into dead formulæ. Such being the case, the artist tries to compromise and produce something which is known as "ecclesiastic art," a thing that has lost nearly all of its vital significance. Yet æsthetically he is under no obligation to copy the archaistic forms and conventions of the Middle Ages; all that is necessary is that his design should agree in subject-matter, composition and colour with the lines, shapes, colours of the architecture; he need not feign *historical* accuracy.

Here, however, another problem raises its head, a problem which concerns mural decoration generally. Some would have "this important branch of painting" encouraged and supported "as a means of spreading a knowledge of art among the people generally"\* Others because "it is a public and municipal educator."†

Both pleas are singularly unreal and mistaken—"The people generally" are no more concerned with a knowledge of art than they are with a knowledge of engineering or therapeutics. "People generally" know when they are not feeling well; it is the doctor's task to make them feel better, and if he recommends a change of air, it is the engineer's task to get them to the seaside with speed and safety. "People generally" *know what they like*, to repeat a phrase which they never tire of using; it is the artist's job to see that they are enabled to like such things as are worthy of affection. "People generally" are in short not concerned with any art, but only with that which is produced *by* art—a very different matter. But the academic mind is still

\* Circular for consideration of the Winter Exhibition Committee, 1922, Royal Academy.

† Edwin H. Blashfield: Mural Painting in America. 1914.

steeped in the belief that " Art " was invented under Pericles, and that it should be regarded as a " polish."

As to the other point, viz.: that " public and municipal art is an *educator*"; that, too, is a contention which will hardly bear scrutiny. There was a time when it could be upheld with justification, a time when in St. Augustine's phrase pictures were " the books of the ignorant," and it is precisely in this sense that pictures were painted on the walls of churches. That is to say, primarily as educators and only secondarily as decorations. Since however, now-a-days, people can read, since moreover the printing press and photography have brought the illustrated text-book within the reach of everyone, mural painting as a means of education is extraordinarily cumbersome and inefficient.

It will be noticed that both pleas are entirely intellectual ; but the whole purpose of Decoration is emotional, impressive. The old artists understood that perfectly well and they endeavoured to give their didactic art an emotional garment. We are more fortunately placed ; we can dispense with didactic significance and concentrate upon the emotional, the directly sensuous aspect of decorations. That aim, however, is not furthered by such side-tracking, for, once the subject of education is brought into the question of æsthetic enjoyment, this question of " historic accuracy," a very vexed one, arises. In the days when decorative painting was didactic, neither artists nor the public knew anything of historic accuracy, but if an artist of to-day were to take such liberties with historic facts or even probabilities as were once quite common, the educative influence of his art would drive educationists to despair.

The Decorator must be free to handle points of historic truth and accuracy with the same freedom, the same *licence* as a Poet. He is indeed a Poet, or if he is not, then he cannot be a decorator. This fact too is disregarded by those who would recommend young painters, indiscriminately, to " take up " wall decoration. Every decorator must be an artist, but it does not follow that every artist can be a decorator. Apart from the fact that the technical equipment of a decorator differs from that required of an easel-picture painter, just as the technical equipment of a statuette modeller differs from that of an architectural sculptor, so also does the mental equipment.



The Decorator's, like the Poet's mind, must be synthetic, because it is concerned with the production of emotional emphasis and not with intellectual analysis. The Decorator must see his work as part of a greater whole and must eliminate ruthlessly all elements which disrupt or interfere with the greater unity and of these elements the facts of historic accuracy are often the least certain and the most disturbing. To the true decorator a vertical line here, a horizontal mass there, a spot of red, a touch of green, a patch of shadow are of vastly greater import than the details of historic accuracy. Decoration is primarily no more representational and therefore *intellectually educative* in its significance than music; like music it must be felt rather than understood.

If the American writer stresses the didactic possibilities of decoration, the Academic writers, after very justly pointing out that "the art of to-day, instead of being merely a luxury for the few might become, by means of wall decoration in appropriate places, a source of continuous inspiration for the whole community," fasten upon one man whose work is essentially only for the few, and not a source of continuous inspiration for the whole community—"Puvis de Chavannes." Æsthetically exquisite, Puvis, an austere intellectual, "an ideologist who used painting as a means of expressing himself," to quote Camille Mauclair, is really the last person whom English artists should seek to emulate if they cherish any hopes of "inspiring the whole community." If they require foreign spirits as leaders they are safer under the guidance of Giotto and Carpaccio, who were not "ideologists"; or if they need inspiration nearer home they might find in Maddox Brown and even in Maclise far safer guides. I am here, of course, not thinking of the purely *æsthetic* and technical achievement of Puvis, which is undoubted and established, though painters will probably find that its success is due to a narrow rigidity of formula which they can copy only at the risk of losing their own "Life."

The problem for the modern artist is to rid himself of *æsthetic* formalism and intellectual complications. As regards the former, he is not bound to be "flat" and simple, he can be as "round" and as complicated, not as he likes, but as occasion demands, and as his medium permits. The only cardinal *æsthetic* offence is an apparent destruction of the *structural* parts of the architecture. A minor offence is the use of a medium in a manner that is not *natural* to it. As to simplification, this is partly a natural result of the

medium employed—such as fresco-painting—but partly also a saving of labour, for a mural decoration is often at such a distance from the eye that complexity not only interferes with the design, but causes unnecessary work.

The question of intellectual complication is far more difficult, when, as is generally the case, the decorator is bound to be representational; that is, to give representations of natural forms and not of more or less abstract designs such as the Moorish decorators. It is more than likely that the decorative art of the future will become increasingly abstract or at least unrepresentational. Meantime the decorator can only hope to succeed if he attacks his proposition in the spirit of a poet and a musician, remembering always that he must awaken emotions and not convey information. As an artist he has no worse enemies than pedagogues and pedants.

One last problem remains to be discussed, that of the permanence of the decorator's work.

There is a process used for wall-painting known as "Keim's"—an extraordinarily scientific and laborious process which is however claimed to be absolutely permanent and unalterable in its results. This gives Mr. Hamilton Jackson occasion to utter in his excellent book on "Mural Painting," in which the different methods of mural decoration are exhaustively discussed, a wise warning:

"And this may well give the artist pause before essaying so perfect a process, for fashion changes and the triumphs of one decade are often paled by the newer lights and the fresher talent of the next, and the painter himself may hold a different opinion on the merits of the work over which he triumphed on its completion, which stares unaltered at him who looks at it with different eyes."



Precisely. Art is destined always to be judged by "different eyes." Yet we are always endeavouring to produce works with one eye on the past and another on the future. There are artists whose human weakness hopes that its work may be preserved for ages of future admiration, though they themselves have drawn their inspiration from the past. There are others whose weakness hopes for a like fate though they endeavour to draw their inspiration from the future. "I think," says Mr. Wyndham Lewis in the second number of his "Tyro," "we should begin to regard ourselves all more in this light—as drawing near to a remote future, rather than receding from an historic past." It is the healthy point of view certainly, but one wonders nevertheless whether in practice it would not be better to allow both past and future to rest and to take care, a little more, of the present; to create only with a full concentration upon the needs of the moment—in the Art of Decoration at all events, though it might not be so bad an advice for the greater art of life as well.

Decorations should satisfy the present—permanence is no criterion of value. "A lifetime" is long enough for most works of art. We must be continually a-building this world—for eternity and immortality is not of it; and in any case the past we seek to emulate and the future we seek to anticipate, have no real existence except in our living selves—the present. In other words time is of no consideration in the Fine Arts which deal only with space, objectively in the things we make, subjectively in that spatial organisation of matter which regarded as the past is no longer, as the future not yet, but in the present alone actually Man.

In un pæse in cui l'arte ha tante rispetto della *society*  
il Brangwyn non si é mai scomodato per mettersi in  
*top hat*.

MARIO BORSA.



## VI. BRANGWYN AMONG HIS CONTEMPORARIES

THE nineteenth century introduced with the industrial revolution a great change in the status and number of the artists and in the nature of their employment.

Before that period artists had been craftsmen for whose activities there was a certain demand. They belonged for the most part either to their own hereditary caste or were as sons of barbers, millers, innkeepers and such like, members of the lower middle class and in England, often foreigners, especially in the decorative arts.

As the nineteenth century progressed and many of the middle classes amassed wealth, the artist lost the refined, intelligent patronage of the Church, a Prince, or the Aristocracy, and ceased to be as regularly and as naturally employed as other craftsmen. On the other hand, however, the sons of successful tradesmen, with their father's fortunes at their backs, with a 'Varsity-bred disinclination for *hard* work but a desire to *do* something, began to take up art and the study of æsthetics, along with science and sociology as suitable occupations for Gentlemen.

All this gave the pursuit of Art a new *cachet*.

The artist-craftsman tended to disappear before the artist-æsthete; the stonemason-sculptor of earlier Gothic times long ousted by the Italian modeller in metal and plaster, was during the nineteenth century replaced by native artist-modellers, who leave the carving to the Italians. For the painter of classic and romantic leanings Rome—in its dual capacity as a classic and catholic focus—regained its influence, and for artists of the modern scientific bent Paris reigned supreme. London as the capital of the greatest industrial country in the world originated, with the aid and inspiration of a foreign prince-consort, a revival in the industrial or applied arts.

But all this meant a total change from earlier conditions. The practice of art became involved and associated with theories—æsthetical, philosophical, scientific, sociological. Art Schools in which much theory and little or no craftsmanship is taught, and what little of that by dilletanti,

not by practical workmen, began to overspread all the European countries ; universities established chairs of æsthetics, the history of art, aided by the facilities of travel, by excavations on grand scales, and by photography, became a " study," aiming at scientific exactness. The Art critic arose—the man who was relied on to tell people what they *ought* to like.

Meantime, the artists, no longer in more or less regular demand, though trained in ever-increasing numbers, began to pour into the markets of the Champs de Mars, Burlington House and elsewhere a regular stream of works for which they hoped to find purchasers, a stream that swelled into a sea of superfluities, among which here and there a few vital and significant works of art might be discerned, drifting like victims helpless in an inundation. Of "the making of books there is no end," but at least the book writer is to a certain extent forced to express himself within the boundaries of the conventions of his language. Subject, object, predicate must be somehow cognisable. No such obligations are imposed upon the language of modern painters, who claim freedom from all conventions, even from that of making themselves intelligible in their own medium, but rely on the medium of literature or even music to make their " expression " intelligible to the eye.

At the beginning of the Nineties things were not quite so " free." The " Impressionists " were—in England at all events—the most *revolutionary* artists. The Millionaire Cézanne, the Father of Postimpressionism, whose paternity research had only just begun in France, was here in England as unknown as Edvard Munch, the Father, and as forgotten as William Blake, the Grandsire, of " Expressionism." Leighton, the Raphaélite, and Watts, the Titianesque, were the leaders of the Academic, Whistler the protagonist of the anti-Academic or Impressionist, and Burne-Jones the Captain of the Romantic and Literary " Schools." Ruskin and Morris and Walter Crane commanded the " Arts and Crafts " battalions of Genteel Socialism ; Ricketts and Charles Shannon were the Aristocratically good, Conder and Beardsley the Aristocratically naughty young men ; whilst Pryde, Nicholson and Craig showed themselves as independent youths of sturdy masculinity, prepared to create their own tradition out of Rowlandson, Crawhall and the " Chap Books."

But with the exception of the Portrait painters who followed Velasquez and Hals and of the landscape painters who followed more or less in the

wake of Turner, Constable and the old Water-colour school, the whole of British Art was clearly associated with literature. The very hearth-tiles produced under the Morris influence were often literary illustrations; whether the pictures were of the highest or the slightest æsthetic value a knowledge of literature was taken for granted, by the Academic and the Romantic Schools certainly, but even landscape painters and artists who had adapted impressionistic means to their own ends frequently gave the merest copies of nature a literary association; a sketch club study of a gaslighted Model who did not know as much as the name of the instrument she was given to hold, appeared on the walls of the Academy as "Music hath Charms," and a landscape painted in broad daylight but with plentiful scarlet and crimson "reflections" found credulous admirers under some such title as "Fast falls the Eventide." But this was fundamentally no worse than the affectation of "higher class" painters who chose their titles from Latin, Greek or Italian literature. Art was then, as now, almost entirely in the hands of men whose connection with theories and literature is closer than their connection with practices and life. Hence we either get works that cringe before or works that, so to speak, turn their backs upon the public.

So it is to-day, so it was in "the Nineties" with this difference, that there is less cringing but a great deal more back-turning. The artist who produces because it is his nature to do so, and not merely his pastime, the artist who would willingly work as a craftsman pure and simple, is still an exception.

Frank Brangwyn is one of these exceptions, and he stands among his contemporaries of to-day as isolated as he stood amongst the artists thirty years ago, when he created his picture of "The Buccaneers." Of its mixed reception in England and the enthusiasm which it created in France, interested readers will find full reference in Mr. Shaw Sparrow's book. What interests us here mainly is its genesis. "The Buccaneers" lashed the critics into a fury, which to-day seems entirely incomprehensible; it was called "garish and aggressive," "slap-dash," "the war-cry of fin-de-siècle barbarism," "a flaming piece of impressionism with the air left out."

The picture represented a crew of Oriental ruffians in a white boat, picturesquely called buccaneers, seen against the blue Mediterranean Sea and rocky orange sea-coast. A brilliant deep red flag supplies the principal



colour contrast. There is plenty of "story" in the picture, The "Buccaneers" have been planning an attack and have failed. Their intended victim is peppering them with shots, whilst they are straining every nerve to get back to their own vessel. The literary part of the subject is splendidly told, down to little details such as the bloodstains of the finger grip on the oar of the wounded man in the foreground—but it is nevertheless, if such mixed metaphor be permissible—the cart before the horse.

Brangwyn, known up to that date only as a sombre painter of low-toned sea pieces, had visited the South and the East; the colours unmitigated by the veil of atmosphere had struck him with a vigour and brutality such as he had never believed possible.

The "Buccaneers" is fundamentally a personification of the drama of light and colour in the Orient. Brangwyn had been moved by the fierce onslaught of light upon the blue, red, white, orange, by the suddenness of chromatic oppositions and extinctions; the *story* of the picture was suggested to the Artist *by the colours of nature*.

To illustrate the working of Brangwyn's mind and to show how it differs materially from the majority, I will give another example. In looking through a portfolio of designs, I came across one which represented no recognisable forms of any natural or conventionalised objects, but was simply a series of curves arranged in a continuous and self-repeating pattern. "What is this for, what does it represent?" I asked. He laughed. "It's a design for a soup-plate." "But what suggested the design?" "Why, a plate of thick soup. Have you not noticed such lines and curves, when you stir the soup? I thought them beautiful, suggesting motion, continuity, cosmic movement and eternity . . ."

From the common-place to the sublime is no great distance. But the mind that is capable of seeing the latter in the former is truly creative. The actual scene which prompted the subject of the "Buccaneers" was merely a boat with customs officials about to inspect a liner in a North African Port.

Brangwyn's manner puzzled the critics; it lacked academic finish and impressionistic science; and its realism was too brutal to satisfy the romantic school. It fitted no pigeon-hole theory; and in that respect Brangwyn's position amongst his contemporaries remains unchanged.

The Artist himself admits his indebtedness to two influences: one is that of La Thangue, whose sunny landscapes and figures were painted with



broad firm touches of the square brush ; the other is Arthur Melville, whose water-colour technique of round dots introduced a new note in water-colour painting. Nevertheless, he explains, it was not this artist's manner of painting, nor the bright and coloury effect of Melville's Oriental scenes which affected him ; Brangwyn himself had essayed similar subjects before, but found no public, and took up the fashionable " Low Tone " because it was more lucrative. What really attracted the young artist to the older man was the latter's sturdy independence of character and his indifference to criticism, which inspired Brangwyn with confidence in his own work.

And in this respect he has not faltered. No modern artist shows less " influences," no one is less docketable than he. His defects and his qualities are all his own. His art is due to what a Danish Critic calls his " Maleriske Urkraft," an untranslatable terminological exactitude which can only be circumscribed as a " natural force manifesting itself individually in Painting," in contradistinction to the artificial force of artists whose work is based on school-theories.

" Il appartient," says M. Léonce Bénédict, " à cette catégorie d'artistes qui ont été chercher l'expression de grands généralités humains ou de grands généralités pittoresques qui semble se rapprocher le plus de l'idée générale qu'on peut se faire de l'humanité, qui par son immobilité apparante à travers le temps parait offrir le moins de " particulier " et pour rester dans la domaine exclusivement esthétique propose la plus riche matière picturale à l'imagination des Artistes."

In other words : Brangwyn is a born decorator. It is in the nature of the decorator's art this " expression de grands généralités humains " ; it is the very essence of decoration that it should treat its matter—in so far as it is representational at all—as a grand synthesis, and not as an analysis of life, which latter belongs to the domain of easel-picture painting.



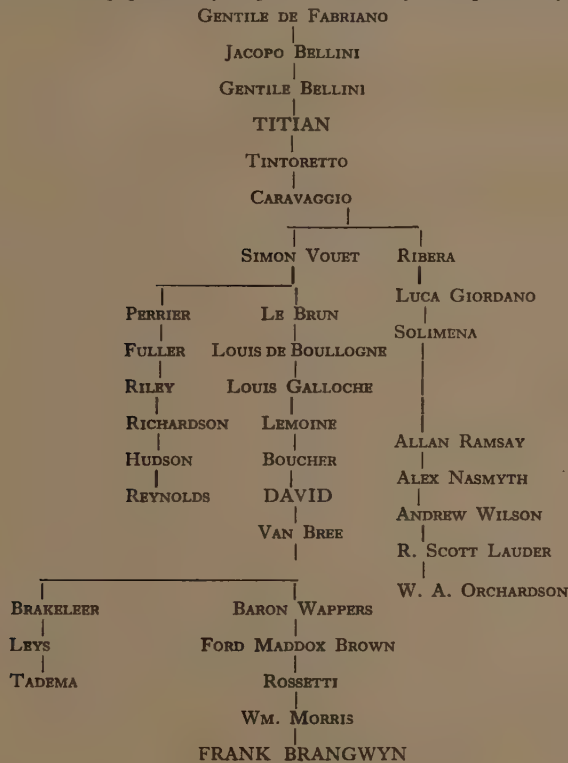


DECORATIVE PANEL FOR BILLIARD ROOM (ONE OF A SET OF SIX).

## VII. BRANGWYN—THE MAN AND ARTIST

**B**RANGWYN began his career with an inherited talent. Pattern-making and architectural construction was in his blood, seeing that his father was both a designer of fabrics and an architect. Furthermore the chance meeting with William Morris encouraged just that side of his genius, *viz.*, decoration, to which he was hereditarily inclined. As a pupil of Morris he links up with an artistic "pedigree" that leads in an unbroken chain to the earliest dawn of the Italian Renaissance.\* Had social conditions not in the course of ages changed so

\* For the entertainment of the curious, I here append Frank Brangwyn's artistic "Pedigree"; the genealogy refers to that between master and pupil, and though I am not prepared to swear to its absolute accuracy, I can affirm that it is more legitimate than most genealogical "Trees," and also that it proves the continuity of teaching; though of course it does not follow that the pupil actually adopted or necessarily developed the style of his teacher.





radically, this in itself should have held out a promise of great success to an artist so equipped—for the greatest painter amongst the old masters—Titian ; one of the greatest decorators—Tintoretto, and three great founders of “ Schools ” Jacopo Bellini, Caravaggio, and David, not to mention many talented if lesser, artists were in his direct line of succession. It goes without saying that an artistic pedigree of this kind does not mean an uninterrupted survival of an artistic tradition; the relationship between pupil and master signifies less and less as the centuries progress. But even the little that may remain is changed by the social conditions under which the Arts are practised. William Morris and Rossetti dug up ancient practices and traditions in an antiquarian spirit, which had but slight kinship with the living practices inherited from their Master-forebears. Brangwyn on the other hand brought to his Art his natural talents, his inherited qualities only, and circumstances of his life forced him to exploit these gifts as a workman who must earn his living, but—and here is the essential difference between the artist on the one, the artisan on the other, and the talented æsthete on the third side—the æsthete works intellectually for the love of art ; the artisan mechanically for his daily bread, the artist for this one reason that his work is a vital necessity to him. If he gets his daily bread, and if, in addition, he is judged to be serving the cause of “ Art ” so much the better, but neither of the two results are the conscious purpose of his activities. He works because he *must* and even when he has no longer any need to “ work for his living ” he goes on producing with unabated zeal—to satisfy his vital impulses.

When Brangwyn was only seventeen years of age he exhibited his first picture in the Academy. Since that time he has produced many hundreds—how many he himself cannot say—of easel pictures, water-colours and pastels. His etchings to date number about three hundred, his lithographs about one hundred and a considerable number of wood-cuts must be added. So far, it might be said he was following only his “ trade ” as a means of earning his livelihood, easel-pictures, water-colours and etchings being more lucrative than any other form of artistic production under present conditions. But if that ideal inspired him he set about its realisation in a strange way, for he soon began to produce pictures and etchings which offended the canons of conventional art. In painting he used broad blobs of oil and sweeping washes of water-colour, and at a time when the world

was worshipping the Whistlerian scratches on small pieces of copper, Brangwyn dug deep furrows with a large tool out of huge plates; in other words, he forced his patrons to accept his work as legitimate, almost against their conscience. At a time when *decorative* Art in so far as any serious thought was given to it at all, lingered on half-heartedly on Morris-fed traditional design, Brangwyn began independently to develop designs of his own and eventually succeeded in securing more commissions for extensive decorative schemes than had fallen to the lot of one man singly in the hey-day of decorative art. There are artists, even in these days, who complain that they have no chances, who demand public support and patronage. There was less demand for decorative work when Brangwyn began and the opportunities for the exercise of free artistic invention in the "arts and crafts" were far scarcer—yet Brangwyn succeeded through the sheer force of his genius in obtaining commissions for such various works as the following: Huge schemes of pictorial decoration involving each the painting of a dozen or more large panels, and thousands of square feet of mural space; complete schemes of room decoration including not only mural paintings but the design of furniture, fittings, carpets, stained glass; designs for street decorations, pageants, designs for memorials, tombstones, diplomas; for presentation caskets, for goldsmiths' work, for book illustrations, and at this very moment he is finishing his architectural design for a picture gallery.

Opportunity may make thieves, and there is a sense in which such "thieving" is not only common but legitimate—I am referring to the influence exerted by the man of genius over the men of talent who exploit the mines of his invention. But if the weaker minds are made by such means, it is the man of genius, the man with the "Maleriske Urkraft" aforesaid, who makes his opportunities.

The circumstances of Brangwyn's early life compelled him to live by his art: that is to say art to him was not a matter for æsthetic speculation, but for practical application, and the more practical it was the better it pleased him. He had neither the training nor the time, and least of all the spirit for theoretical æsthetics from which he fled as soon as opportunity offered; he preferred even life before the mast to life behind Morris.

That may not have been wholly to the good; the artist himself has confessed to me that he sometimes not only regrets that he has had no

*academic* training, but still more that he is constitutionally unable to interrupt his work in order to indulge in longer spells of contemplation. That he is only happy when he is at work has, however, psychological reasons upon which we need not enter.

Brangwyn has had to "rough it"; character, temperament and circumstances deprived him of that which Walpole would call "politeness." There is no "by your leave" in his art. It is not precious; neither is it intellectual. Strangely enough it has singularly little "sex" in its complexion. One thinks this strange because it is what is generally called "healthy" and eminently virile.

Virility is indeed its outstanding quality, and it is of a kind rare in this country: we must go back to Maddox Brown, James Ward, Raeburn, Rowlandson, Morland and Hogarth for its like, whilst amongst the younger men, Orpen, though essentially a painter and not a decorator, shows a similar virile mastery of technique. As a colourist Brangwyn is sensuous and links up rather curiously with a decorator of a very different temperament—Charles Conder, whose colour-orchestration represents the subtle and minor scale to Brangwyn's sounding major—but their chromatic relationship derives from the fact that in both there is an unconsciously sensual, rather than a conscious and intellectual selection.

Brangwyn's at all events is an empirical mind, and the more one considers the results of scientific æsthetics, the greater becomes the conviction that the born artist must be an empiric—which is a circumlocution of the Latin "*poeta nascitur*."

Only those who have had the privilege of intimacy with Brangwyn will be able to confirm the writer's experience that this artist possesses a fund of empirical knowledge that has placed him in possession of truths which no theoretical study and science could equal. It is this quality of his mind which makes him British to the core in contrast with such a mind as Puvis de Chavannes which is French, though perhaps not to the core.

Brangwyn tackles the problems of his existence both as a man and as a painter from the vantage-ground of the emotions. We were discussing old masters one day in his old house in Sussex, and he told me of a portrait of Anne of Cleves which he once possessed. "But I got rid of it," he commented with an emphasis that struck me as curious; "Why?" I asked. "Well, I don't know exactly why; I had to do so. It made me feel



uncomfortable." I looked at him wonderingly. "You see," he continued : "this place is part of 'the jointure' of Anne of Cleves, and I thought there might perhaps be some. . ." "Ghost," I interrupted. "You don't believe in ghosts." "No, not in personal apparitions—but sort of spiritual influences. . ."

Another time we were discussing media and colours and their defects : "Couldn't a chemist advise you ?" I asked. "The chemists only understand one half of the business. They can tell you all about the chemical constituents of pigments, and oils and varnishes, just as they can tell you the chemical constituents of a plant or an animal, but they can tell you nothing about that other thing which we call 'life' and there is a mysterious something in colours and vehicles which I can only describe as *life*, and about which we painters know little enough, but the chemists nothing. It has something to do with the action of the sun perhaps, something over and above the purely chemical action. I cannot explain it, I only know from experience that it exists."

"What puzzles me," I remember saying on one occasion, after having compared his canvas with the "still life" built up in his studio, "is the freedom with which you transpose the objects in front of you, on your canvas: I can see no blue, for instance, at this end of the composition of the objects where you have it in your picture."

"It is where I want it. When one is painting a decorative panel one uses nature only as a peg, and that applies not only to still life. I remember years ago how an academician found fault with one of my historical subjects because I had given one of the figures a blue cloak, which as a matter of historical accuracy ought to have been of another shade. He would not admit that it was more important that the cloak should be of that particular blue as part of the whole decorative scheme which ultimately included what was outside the picture, than that it should be accurate."

"I notice," I said "that you frequently repeat your colour orchestrations—you do not often vary them."

"No, I know. When once you have found certain harmonies and contrasts to be satisfactory, should you change them for no better reason than 'novelty' ?" People are always demanding something new, as if there were merit in novelty. Besides, he added, I do not think about my 'orchestrations,' as you call it, in that way at all. I may take a stroll after



my work and notice a striking colour combination in the street, on the banks of the river, anywhere, and that may affect the colour scheme of a picture I may happen to have in hand—simply because it has moved me. One must get one's ideas from such things and not from thinking them out with cold calculation. Art is emotion or it is nothing. Do you think the old masters did not put the emotions they got from life into their sacred subjects? Masterpieces are not painted by rote or reasoning."

That reminded me of a very true remark of Ruskin's: "If a painter *thought*, he would instantly go wrong." The painter's *thought* is the result of an intuitive emotional process.

On some other occasion we were discussing war memorials and I happened to mention a particular one in a country village, approving its simplicity.

"It's all wrong, Brangwyn retorted, almost with anger. It looks all wrong in the landscape; it's the wrong colour, the wrong shape, the wrong material—it's already crumbling, and in any case it is not part and parcel of the landscape, of its environment. It's a . . .\* intellectual exercise and bears no relation whatever to the emotion which should have found expression. But they don't know anything about Art because they don't *feel* anything. Of course, he added, I admit it's not always easy to stick to one's principles even when one knows better; one's patrons have ideas of their own; one is not often given a free hand, and besides it is difficult to act against one's own interests. I have sometimes been tempted to tell a man who wanted to commission a decorative panel for a certain space: 'Your place is already *over*-decorated—give a workman half-a-crown and tell him to white-wash the wall—that's all the *decoration* it requires. But one does not do that. One accepts the commission. On the other hand one is often tempted to offer to do a decoration where it is needed, even for nothing, and then what happens? I remember a case when I offered to complete an important scheme of decoration for which I had already painted half-a-dozen or more large panels by the addition of two more, which were to occupy two spaces instead of two sculptured reliefs which looked out of place. But the owners of the hall, being shrewd business men, refused my offer because I did not ask extra payment; they felt there must be something 'fishy' about it; they feared a 'trap.' That really is part of the trouble. Our age is thoroughly commercialised. The layman can no

\* The reader is asked to imagine an infinite number of highly-coloured adjectives and expletives and interjections, distributed amongst this account of Brangwyn's conversations, if he wishes to realise their full flavour.

longer understand the craftsman's pride in his work. Even the craftsman himself has lost it. I can remember in the old days a bricklayer would take his wife and family of a Sunday to shew them a bit of a brick wall he had laid. He would stand in front of it and smoke a pipe of satisfaction. It wasn't only the money then. That's why it's extremely foolish when writers are advocating the revival of mural decoration as a means of making money—because 'easel picture painting does not pay.' Firstly you can't *take up* wall decoration, it requires not only a special knowledge and practice, it requires a different temperament, a different conception of art, altogether. But let that pass. It is impossible to be a good decorator if you are only thinking of making it pay. Over and over again I have had to waste precious time and material simply because the work as originally planned and contracted for did not satisfy me. In Leeds, for example, after contracting for and actually painting the best part of the decoration, I decided to turn it into mosaic, because of the local conditions of the atmosphere—nothing, by-the-by, looks worse than a grimy picture—but the cost of this change came out of my pocket. Here, look at these things : the cost of turning these designs into mosaic alone is over two thousand pounds, and as I get (here he mentioned a figure which I am not at liberty to disclose, but which seemed to me far from exorbitant) you can see the margin is not great. Consider the amount of preparatory work that had to be done." He pointed to a stack of sketches in pastel, drawings in chalk, charcoal and pencil, scale drawings and a number of alternative designs—the work of many months. "It is a very serious matter and I'm afraid it puts a premium on bad work. At least I know that I have sometimes let things go out of my hands which I ought not to have allowed to pass, simply because the scale of payment made it impossible to do oneself justice."

"You ought to have refused, in the first place," I ventured. "I know, but I simply cannot refuse. I am always tempted because any new commission presents a new problem, and any new problem attracts me. Take this case of the passion pictures here. There was first of all a sentimental reason. But there was also this other. The 'Stations of the Cross' are perhaps the most important subject matter of any Church decoration, and I feel that they should be essentially *story* pictures. The problem is to make them dramatic, and at the same time to give them decorative qualities ; this is still further complicated by the fact that the

nature of the subject requires a sombre, dignified treatment, whilst the nature of decoration, and particularly in this case, a Church for Lepers, seemed to demand the introduction of a bright and really cheerful general effect. I began with enthusiasm, hoping to make it my best work. Then my client, a dying man, kept urging me on because he wanted to see the pictures in the Church before his death—and I hurried. Should I have stopped and refused to go on?—perhaps. . . You may say this is special pleading, an effort to excuse myself. . . perhaps it is. All I know is that Art is not a . . . cold-blooded business, and the artist is a man before he is an artist, and should be judged as a man and not as a superman.”

To Brangwyn the purpose of painting is not the production of a work of art; but the work of art is the result of applying painting to a definite purpose. “I am a decorator,” he says: “my problem is to make a Church, or a room, or a building look warmer, happier, and to complete what the Architect leaves unfinished. Grant that I have achieved that aim, and you may criticise my ‘painting’ as much as you like.”

“Problems of æsthetics do not interest you”? I suggested. “What do you mean by problems of æsthetics? There is far too much theorising in modern art. Most of the advanced painters, as they are called, worry themselves trying to paint a sausage like a ham and a ham like a cathedral. All that sort of thing is useless. You have to be *moved* by the thing you have seen in nature, and try to express what you feel, and not what someone else has seen or felt, or said you should. There’s too much high-faluting about art nowadays. There’s no *heart* in it; it’s become a . . . intellectual exercise or a science, instead of a job.”

To a patron for whom Brangwyn had designed the decoration, the furniture and fittings of several rooms, and who asked him afterwards to dinner, the artist wrote to this effect: “Many thanks for your invitation; but when your plumber has done a job for you, you would not ask him to dine with you, however satisfactorily he may have done it. That’s my case. I am delighted that you are satisfied with my work, and if you should want another job done I am at your service.”

That is not polite perhaps but, after all, the right spirit.

The long reign of the easel picture makes Brangwyn’s conception of his position hardly intelligible to minds imbued with the idea of making pictures to fit theories, and whatever criticism may be levelled against his



work, this remarkable and indisputable fact remains: there is no living painter *anywhere* to-day who can fill as much mural space with anything approaching Brangwyn's inborn skill, practical knowledge and natural efficiency. There is also no artist who stands more firmly on his own feet, who owes both the qualities and the defects of his art more closely to himself, than he, and lastly, there is none more clearly than he entitled to be called a Master.



PHOTOGRAPH OF FRANK BRANGWYN IN FRONT OF ONE OF THE PANELS FOR THE MISSOURI STATE CAPITOL—  
SEE PLATE FACING PAGE 153





"DANCING"—DECORATIONS FOR M. BING

## VIII. THE DECORATIONS FOR M. BING'S HOTEL

(FRESCO, "KEIM'S" PROCESS ON CANVAS)

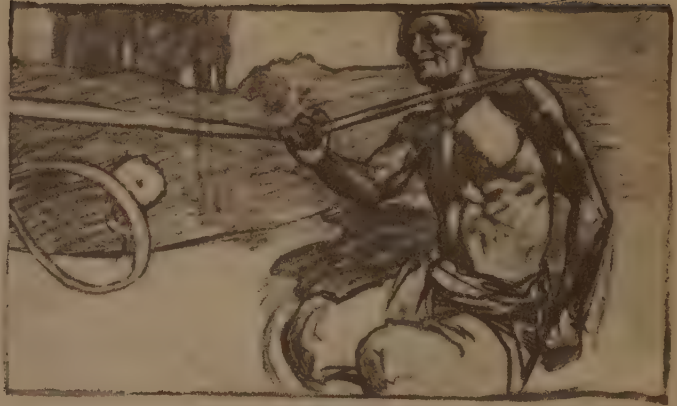


AT the beginning of "the Nineties" a new wave of art enthusiasm broke over the Continent. Engendered by the "Arts and Crafts" movements in England it took a different form on the Continent. The Morris School had taught a return to the handicrafts and a revival of the Gothic spirit, and in as much as Gothic are more naturalistic than the severely stylised Renaissance and Classic *Forms* it involved in a measure a return to Nature. This orientation of the applied arts towards natural ornament and decoration coincided with the French naturalistic or so-called "plein-air" movements. The two, combined with elements inspired by the Rococco,\* formed what came to be known through M. Bing's Paris enterprise as "L'Art Nouveau."

For M. Bing's Hotel, Frank Brangwyn, already a painter of continental reputation through his Oriental subjects, designed his first independent *purely decorative* work. Associated with M. Bing at the same time were H. C. van der Velde, the furniture designer, and Albert Besnard, the painter, who was, like Brangwyn, engaged on painting "decorations." This fact is extremely significant for the attitude of the period towards this branch of the Arts. Besnard is an extraordinarily accomplished painter, a man who in the pictorial record of purely optic facts has probably carried the art of painting as far as it can go in that direction. No problem of technique and optics is too difficult for him, his "twilight" portraits alone would have

\* Rococco was itself a combination of realism and idealism.

made him famous. Besnard's name, however, stands high in the ranks of decorators, because of his frescoes in the "Ecole de Pharmacie"—poignant realism—and in the "Hotel de Ville"—realistic symbolism. Nothing can detract from their merit as pictures and as painting, yet it is open to



doubt whether they can really be called decorations. Besnard has not the *decorator's* mental complexion. Instead of generalising he particularises, instead of synthesis he gives us analysis. The very moon in one of his "allegories" is painted with such accuracy that it must warm the cockles of the hearts that have to keep themselves warm on the summit of Mount Hamilton at an altitude of 4,280 feet. (I will not swear to this figure, but accuracy is not everything). Besnard's great qualities as a painter and technician are his very defects as a decorator.

The particular job that inaugurated Brangwyn's career as a decorator was a frieze one hundred and eighty feet long, intended for the front of M. Bing's premises, and two panels for the entrance hall. It was painted in Keim's process on canvas. The exterior decorations were painted—against time—and on the spot; there were no preparatory sketches, the design being drawn in blue outline, here and there relieved by touches of colour. "A part of the Frieze" says Mr. Shaw Sparrow,\* "was put under the eaves: it represented Eastern Workmen plying their craft of pottery, seated in characteristic attitudes. Another band of frieze ran below the windows of the top floor, and like the one, it was carried out round both sides of the building. Its decorative features were a few human figures connected by a design of scroll work and plant forms." His technique in the interior panels, representing "Music and Dancing," was much "thinner" and flatter than in his later work, and remind one of the naïve sounding name

\* Frank Brangwyn and his Work. London. Kegan Paul, 1915.

formerly given to pictures painted on canvas, *viz.* : "stained cloths." The effect of these decorations was that of painted tapestry. Brangwyn was, however, already aiming at composition by means of flat pattern, but had not yet evolved composition by means of masses. He uses already the strengthening vertical, as the result of studying Mantegna, for the slender uprights meant to represent tree-trunks are so straight, and so little realistic that they must be regarded as purely decorative, *i.e.*, abstract elements of design. Altogether it is a strange world of trees, grass, flowers, sunshine and figures that he introduces us to ; a two dimensional world, Japanese in feeling, though not at all in manner. The effect is very real—but not in Besnard's sense.

It is perhaps a pity that Brangwyn did not develop this early decorative manner of his because its comparative simplicity of technique might have led to the foundation of a real Brangwyn "School," which his later manner, by reason of its far greater complexity has made impossible.







"BLACKSMITHS"—PART OF THE PANELS AT LEEDS.

## IX. EXHIBITION ROOM DECORATION AT VENICE AND LEEDS

(PAINTED IN OIL, TURPENTINE AND WAX)



**I**F we except a frieze for a Music Room and a design for a whole bedroom, which Brangwyn created in 1900, and to which I shall again refer later, the Artist did not execute any purely decorative work until 1905, *i.e.*, ten years after the Bing decorations, which were used, however, partly for the exterior walls of "L'Art Nouveau."

In 1905 he tackled for the first time the problem of *interior* decoration suitable for Exhibition-rooms. It is a problem to which continental nations have given a great deal of thought during the last few decades, but it is strangely enough one that never seems to have presented itself to the architects and artists of earlier generations. In the nineteenth, eighteenth and seventeenth centuries—regular picture-exhibitions do not seem to have been held indoors before the seventeenth century—pictures were commonly shown hung closely upon the walls as one arranges postage stamps to-day on sheets. In the nineteenth and eighteenth century an element of incongruity was introduced by the arbitrary method of framing, though the gilding of the diverse carved or "compo" frames supplied a certain amount of uniformity, often enough in keeping with the architecture. In the seventeenth century all pictures incorporated in a collection and



"POTTERS"—PART OF THE PANELS AT LEEDS

whether portraits or landscapes, religious or classical, Dutch, Flemish or Italian, or Spanish, seem to have "worn" a uniform black, black and gold or other dark frame, as we can see in several old pictures of picture galleries. It would seem that the original Italian or Spanish carved and gilded frames were deliberately removed, so that the eye might not be distracted from the pictures themselves. In those days Titians and Rembrandts, van Dycks and Velasquez's might thus be seen not only shoulder to shoulder but standing, as it were, upon each other's heads. This I think proves fairly conclusively that no easel picture was looked upon as a wall decoration in itself. It also proves that the spectator was credited with sufficient power of concentration not to let his eye be influenced by the colours or forms of pictures which surround the one he was looking at.

With the progress of the nineteenth century and the advent of the twentieth, easel picture painters, more and more imbued with the consciousness of their own individuality and at the same time less confident in its strength, began to demand special effects of staging, much as the "stars" of the modern stage borrow additional brilliance from the limelight. Sculptors, too, clamoured for better treatment. There is a good deal to be said *for* this demand on the part of painter and sculptor, there is also something to be said *against* it, as, confining myself here to the particular problem Brangwyn had to deal with, I hope to show in another chapter.

A room in an open exhibition such as the Venice International is destined



to be filled with a more or less considerable number of thoroughly heterogeneous works: sculpture in various materials, dimensions and colours, pictures in many different sizes, styles, colour schemes and subject matter, not to mention frames. All these things have to be assembled in such a manner as to form an agreeable *ensemble* without encroaching upon each other—and without



interference from the architectural environment, in which latter we must include also the furniture and fittings. It is the decorator's task to reduce his decorations to a mere, but agreeable back-ground, positive enough to serve its purpose, but neutral enough to bestow its grace impartially.

To this end Brangwyn divided the walls by a flat rail into two parts, the lower being well over half as wide as the upper. The rail forming a horizontal line was divided at intervals by verticals in the shape of simple pilasters running alternately from ceiling to floor and to the rail. The lower part of the wall was hung with the grey-buff coloured material only, whilst the upper part was further sub-divided by a frieze-rail, the frieze itself being dark-blue, powdered with a few silver stars, whilst below it ran a broader band of pale yellow. Into this general scheme he introduced four painted panels; the two for the side walls being eighteen feet in length by five feet in height; the two others for the end walls were of course of equal height but only seven feet in length. Reaching from cornice to rail and from one long pilaster to the next, the panels were framed by the architectural woodwork.

Two feet from the floor ran a narrow shelf resting on square blocks, again dividing the wall space horizontally.

The centre of the floor was occupied by a specially designed pedestal which supported a large sized piece of sculpture by Goscombe John. This was surrounded by four bay-trees. A very simple bench and pedestals of the same rectangular style completed the furniture of the room.

"In the arrangement of this room," he said at the time,\* "I have endeavoured to cause the person who enters it to feel the presence of a quiet richness, a certain sense of harmony without being able to for the moment give any reason for it."

The reason, however, was no doubt this. In all rectangular spaces there are æsthetically speaking, certain points which are particularly suited for decorative emphasis: these points are to be found in the centre of each wall as points of principal emphasis†; this is where Brangwyn placed his panels which were kept in a low tone and repeated the principal colours of the room decoration, *viz.*: gold and grey, blue and light yellow. Harmony of colour and the utmost simplicity of line thus formed a quiet foil for the exhibits.

\* See "Studio" article May, 1905.

† Secondary points are the four corners, tertiary points the four centres of the half walls, etc.; all these points are related and require mutual compensation.

The subject matter of these panels was illustrative of "English Industry" and of Brangwyn's particular genius, since he, as no other artist before him, has forced modern Industry to yield him material for decorative purposes. The subjects in this case were: 1, Workers in Steel; 2, Excavators; 3, Pottery makers; and 4, Smiths.

What strikes one even in these earlier decorations is Brangwyn's sense of compositional stability rather than the mere *flatness* of design. The intimate relation, in Brangwyn's mural painting, between picture and architecture is owing to a continuity of tectonic structure in the composition of his picture, and the unity of the carrying values of his colour schemes. From this we should deduce the fact that the importance of mural decoration lies not in the limitations of a medium, such as "buon fresco," but in the skill with which any medium even a naturally almost unrestricted one, such as oil, is subordinated to the superior purpose. But I shall have occasion to refer to this later.

When these four pictures were subsequently bought by Mr. Wilson and presented to the City Art Gallery at Leeds, it was found necessary to add a fifth. This was "The Spinners." Brangwyn overcame the difficulty involved in the composition of an architectural "surporte" dexterously. Nevertheless I venture to question the fitness of the rotating spinningwheel. I need not to be reminded of Velasquez' "Hilanderas" in which the same "motif" occurs; precedent in art is no proof, even though it may be an argument. Violent motion is always questionable in pictorial or plastic art, but in a subject that is qua *mural* decoration static movement should only be potential, not actual, even though actuality here depends only on an optical illusion.





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These Venice decorations look, in their English home after seventeen years of smoke and grime, mere shadows of their former state. I am assured that they have been regularly cleaned, and the inference, therefore, is that they have lost their colour through some flaw in the medium, if not through the regularity of the "cleaning." Perhaps the turpentine used may have had this darkening effect. In addition to this deterioration it is further to be noted that the architecture of the room in the Leeds Gallery is quite unsuited for them; it is both too low and too small, unfortunately.

For the Venice Exhibition of 1907, Brangwyn, who had been honoured with a gold medal on the first occasion, was again asked to furnish four panels.

This time he had intended to use contemporary Venetian life as the peg upon which to hang his decorative compositions, and with this idea in mind two large panels, *viz.*: "Venetian Commerce" and "Venetian



Serenaders " were completed. The committee, however, requested him to adhere to *British* subjects for this *British* section of the Exhibition and he complied by furnishing two further compositions, "Agricultural Labourers" and "Miners," to complete the set. It seems a pity that his original scheme was spoilt by the introduction of different subject matter ; nevertheless the colour harmony preserved the necessary continuity and unity of the whole decoration. It is evident from their technique and treatment that, in the second Venice panels, Brangwyn displays a rather different mood : The pictorial rather than the architectural quality of composition is here predominant and—judging only from reproductions—I should say they were not so successful as the first series : they seem to lack structural firmness without possessing the textile quality which made the "Bing" panels so admirable.





"MODERN COMMERCE"—DECORATION IN THE ROYAL EXCHANGE

## X. THE ROYAL EXCHANGE PANEL, "MODERN COMMERCE"

(ROBERSON'S SPIRIT FRESCO)

**A**LTHOUGH Brangwyn had begun an important series of wall decorations for a City Company two years earlier, the panel "Modern Commerce" painted for the Royal Exchange in 1906 was the first permanent wall decoration of his seen in a public building in London. It is not a true "fresco" and so purists might object to it being called a "*permanent*" wall decoration at all, and permanence seems to be regarded, for not very good reasons, as of equal, if not of greater importance (almost) than quality—in mural decoration. "Modern Commerce" is as a matter of fact painting on canvas, like the rest of the pictures there. As to permanence and the means employed in achieving it, let me first of all cite the following passages from Mr. Hamilton Jackson's excellent Manual.\*

Quoting Professor Church, he reports: "The paintings in the Royal Exchange are "marouflé" on slate slabs slightly inclined forward at the top and with ventilated air space behind. The composition used was thick paste of white lead, oil, and copal varnish spread on the slate and the back of the picture at the same time." Then he himself goes on to say: "Whatever the medium employed, the air space behind the surface on which the paint is applied, very much increases the likelihood of its permanency, and if back and front are both protected and the colour used so as to avoid chemical changes, one is inclined to think there can be no deterioration."

Authorities then confirm, what is also Brangwyn's contention, *viz.*: that canvas paintings can be made as "permanent" as all-plaster. We are however a little too much inclined to regard permanence as of paramount importance, and in consequence countenance rank stupidities. One of the chief charms of fresco-painting, and indeed of any process of applying "flat" colour to the surface of the wall, is the absence of reflections from the surface and consequently excellent visibility. Some of these processes

\* F. Hamilton Jackson. "Mural Painting." London: Sands & Co.

depend more on the plasterer than on the painter, and such is the trouble taken to secure permanence that the preliminary treatment of the wall may take months and months, the poor plasterer meantime going mad with worry.\* When at last the "fresco" is finished and as permanent as it can be made by human ingenuity, it is considered so precious a thing that it is promptly "preserved" under a sheet of glass—*vide* the mural decorations in the Palace of Westminster—and so completely buried in a glass-coffin, destined never to be seen, and so never to fulfil its purpose at all. Even ordinary oil-painting would serve its purpose better than fresco in such circumstances.

There is, however, another reason why fresco painting and other processes are held in greater esteem than oil. The plaster used in these processes greedily absorbs the water or other vehicle of the pigments, so that the artist can only paint in a broad, light and simple manner. This limitation, which is a technical necessity, has been converted into an æsthetic law—applicable to all mural decoration. But there is not necessarily any virtue in simplicity, nor vice in complexity. Maclise's frescoes in water-glass in the Houses of Parliament—"The Death of Nelson at Trafalgar" and "Blucher and Wellington after Waterloo"—are quite admirable, exceedingly competent, and though complex, much better decorations than, *e.g.*, the true and simple fresco of St. Cecilia by Sir John Tenniel. On the other hand William Dyce's frescoes in the King's Robing Room, more particularly the "Hospitality," are incomparably better than Seymour Lucas' "Flight of the Five Members" in St. Stephen's Hall, there, or than most of the "decorations" in the Royal Exchange. In the Houses of Parliament, too, pupils of Edwin Abbey, such as Cowper, Eden, Board and others have done much better than their master in the Royal Exchange, though the process is the same, and, taken all in all, the design and the colouring not very different.

Now for the reasons of this criticism. Maclise's and Dyce's decorations are firstly actual "decorations" and not pictures on a wall like Lucas'. The Maclises look like rather splendid tapestries; the Dyces match in their colour scheme the architectural features, carved wood and stone, the colours of which they repeat. Tenniel's fresco would have been alright if Tenniel himself had been a more competent artist; but whilst his fresco for all its simplicity suffers through his incompetence, Maclise's competence

\* Jackson. "Mural Painting." p. 64.

turns his complexity to good account. Again if we look at the passage in the Houses of Parliament decorated by Abbey's eight pupils as an æsthetic unit, then the decoration is a poor one, because, although there is a superficial colour harmony, there is no compositional continuity. The decoration consists of eight highly finished, separate paintings in Le Blanc's process, which in their stone framework look, so far as the glass will permit one to judge, exceedingly well, because they are close to the eye-level. Abbey's picture in the Royal Exchange, on the other hand, is in a shaded ambulatorium, above the level of the eye, and though a good picture in itself, without a justification for its position and dimensions.

The whole point, of course, is that neither process nor simplicity of design can form in themselves criteria of excellence, which alone are given by the temperamental fitness and technical competence of the decorator, who will regulate his manner of decoration by its position and purpose.

Temperamental fitness ! If you perambulate the Royal Exchange it is driven home to you that Brangwyn's wall painting alone displays it, and next to him perhaps Lord Leighton's. Of course none of the artists are responsible for the fact that there is no continuity in the composition of these decorations, which in most cases are simply pictures that happen to have been pasted on a wall. But Brangwyn by choosing as his subject "Modern Commerce" proves at once that a general theme is more suited for decorative purposes than a historical episode, particularly where an effort is made to represent it with historical accuracy. History is not Decoration, and when Maclise paints the "Death of Nelson," no one imagines that he intended to paint a *historical* record of the event ; but the subjects in the Royal Exchange all look as if they were meant to be taken and *read* as historical documents, all except Brangwyn's. His picture is an allegory, a symbol of Modern Commerce; nothing in it is to be taken literally, neither the dockers, nor the cranes, neither the funnels, nor the scaffolding. Its *meaning* is reduced to the simplest elements. But æsthetically, that is to say, considered as a thing intended to make an emotional rather than an intellectual appeal, every detail is carefully thought out. If one compares his first sketch with the finished design, one sees how in its inception it was far more literal and pictorial, whilst in its final form it had become allegorical and architectural. In the sketch, the dock labourers, with their crates, bales, baskets and cases are composed in a loose vivid pattern, the





FIRST SKETCH FOR THE ROYAL EXCHANGE PANEL.

lights being concentrated in the lower middle of the rectangle, and the vertical lines are weak and broken. The finished picture is an organic, closely-knit unit growing from the darker left-hand base, which *in situ* receives the most light, in easy but continuous development upwards into the lighter atmospheric background, which *in situ* receives the least light, the decided verticals touching the top of the arched framework and so keeping the whole composition in close contact with the architecture. Compare any of the other pictures there with Brangwyn's and you will realise that either ignorance of first principles or anxiety about subject matter has destroyed tectonic unity of picture with the architecture. The essence of good decoration is closely-knit and organically developed composition plus colour orchestration so harmonised in



colour perspective as to keep the picture a part of the wall. To these principles subject matter must be *entirely* subordinated. Observe, however, that for that reason decoration is more readily *intelligible* than illustration, which latter needs additional explanations—a text in fact. Looking at Brangwyn's decoration the spectator can gather, by inference, more about "Modern Commerce" than he can gather in the same manner about "Dick Whittington," "Nelson" or "The Fire of London," to mention a few of the "illustrations" there at random.

## XI. THE SKINNERS' HALL DECORATIONS

(OIL)



**B**EGUN in 1904, Brangwyn's Decorations for the Skinners' Hall were completed in 1909. The scheme involved the painting of no less than eleven panels nine feet six inches high, seven of them measuring ten feet six inches in width, the two small ones being half their width.

Here, then, the artist had a chance denied him at the Royal Exchange, *viz.*, that of creating a homogeneous scheme, so far as the interior architecture, heavily carved brown oak enriched with gilding, the walls divided by heavy pilasters, would let him. Brangwyn had to compromise; for the colour and style of the decorative architectural features, further complicated by a huge stained glass window, and a disproportionate frieze above the high, too high, wainscotting, were not to his liking. A further compromise still was demanded of him, and one that perhaps would not have been experienced by an artist of a less pronounced temperament: I refer to the choice of subjects made for him by his employers, *viz.*, incidents in the history of the Worshipful Company beginning with "The City Mart in the Days before the Guild of Corpus Christi received their Charter" and "The Granting of their Charter to the Skinners' Company by Edward III., March

1st, 1327," and ending with "Sir Thomas Pilkington's Banquet to King William the Third and Queen Mary, A.D. 1684."

The titles and dates alone seem redolent with the musty flavour of a thing that has long ago ceased to have any real connection with life; the last incident the Worshipful "Skinners" deem worthy of commemoration is the fact that their forefathers once dined a King and Queen—and "did them well," no doubt.

This is said with but the least "malice prepense," because such things have a great deal to do with life and therefore with questions of Art. Brangwyn, rightly regarding it as the decorator's duty to do what his employers ask of him and not, as many modern artists seem to think, to impose his own "subjects" autocratically upon his patrons, devoted himself to his task as if the subjects had had a real and vital significance, which with but two or three exceptions they can hardly be said to have. As a true artist, however, he converts dates and data, to his own uses in a manner that must be called ingenious, as I hope may be gathered from the following descriptions and observations.

The first picture to be completed, and one that was exhibited at the Royal Academy was :

(8)\* "The Departure of Sir James Lancaster. (A wide panel.)

Sir James Lancaster was "the pioneer of the English Trade with the East Indies, and the following is a description of the subject by Mr. Draper in his sumptuous account of the Skinners' Hall Decorations :†

"Eastward ho ! With a rum below  
And hurrah for the Foreign Main, O !"

"The Sailors are chanting the merry catch to drown their care ; the cables creak and the warps strain ; the blocks rattle with loose halyards, except where the impatient sails are bellying in the breeze that shall bear these adventurers down the Thames to the Ocean. Such is the scene, imaged forth for our eyes, and almost for our ears, in the background of this panel. In front, upon the steps of a jetty at Deptford, near the home of Sir Thomas Smythe, that worthy Skinner is bidding 'good voyage' to his brother of the Guild, Sir James Lancaster. Swarthy in complexion, alert in his bearing, this sea-captain is departing on a second expedition for the East Indies. He is eagerly awaited by an escort of armed mariners and

\* The numbers in brackets indicate the arrangement on the walls.

† Warwick H. Draper. *The Historical Paintings in the Great Hall in London of the Worshipful Company of Skinners* : Caradoc Press, 1909.



drummers ; another boat is held to the quay by a bare-headed sailor, who is approached by boys carrying provisions from the steps. It is a sight which frequently stirred the heart of Elizabeth's of England."

Stirred the heart, and gladdened the eye ; for the Elizabethans loved colour, as we do to-day but with less sophistication : aniline dyes were—perhaps mercifully—unknown to them ; Brangwyn, too, has eschewed its gaudiness. But what a pattern has he not woven for us. Scarlet sings the joy of life against the darkling foil of energy in man, in ocean and in sky ; the Whites, pure, greyish and bluish twine in and out, linking the gorgeousness of the red with the tawny yellows and the dark blues of sky and ocean, passing through greys into sombre wine colour, the gleam of sunlight laying brilliant spots among the shadows. Containing recognisable portraits, superficially true in their setting, it is a historical painting, no doubt, yet its value lies not in its lesson, but in the pure pleasure it gives by its cunning light- shade- and colour-pattern.

(2) The " Granting of their Charter to the Skinners' Company by Edward III., March 1st, 1327 " (a wide panel), is a representation of a scene which is obviously far from historical accuracy in its arrangement.

" In Mr. Brangwyn's panel, the Royal lad of fifteen, who in his manhood gave order and commercial prosperity to his Kingdom, sits on a high dais among changing sunlight and shade of a pergola outside the walls of his castle. Leaning forward he listens to the petition of the Skinners who read from a scroll. Among them, it may be, is Thomas Legge, a noteworthy citizen who also claimed Italian ancestry and later was twice Mayor of London. In the foreground, before a barrier that fences off the groups round the King, a lawyer laden with deeds is whispering to an officer of the Court. A page stands to the right, heedless of the Ceremony but guarding his master's shield."

This painting must be the despair of the stickler for historic accuracy. What castle is this, with its high and narrow arch ? What country is this where people can sit on March the First under a pergola of vine in autumn foliage, and what lawyer would carry and scatter bundles of deeds ? Is it allegory ? Possibly, but whatever it is, it is simpler and better " history " than any of Rubens' " Marie de Medici " decorations, which, in obedience to the spirit of the time, swarmed with mythological and symbolical figures,



THE OPENING OF THE STRIFE BETWEEN THE SKINNERS AND THE MERCHANT  
TAYLORS, A.D. 1484

by which means more than by any inherent design these paintings became "decorative."

Brangwyn relies for the same purpose on the colour and composition alone. We find here, as in the "Lancaster" panel, dark masses used as a foil to the lights. Here, too we have, a triumphant scarlet paling into a salmon tint and darkening into a claret colour, but the rhythm of this picture is the horizontal and perpendicular, whilst in the former case the composition swung with a curve from the right hand top to the left. In this, as in nearly all decorative compositions Brangwyn uses, as already emphasized, the upright line running out of the picture, such as we find it in Mantegna and Carpaccio, as a means of imparting strength, stability and tectonic unity to the composition.

The same feature characterises :

- (4) "The Opening of the Strife between the Skinners and the Merchant Taylors, A.D. 1484." (A wide panel).

"Master Workmen," says Mr. Draper, "apprentices and without doubt some representatives of that unemployed fraternity which loves a street accident or public squabble, are filling the roadway. The ensigns and badges of several Guilds identify the scene. An old Skinner—perhaps Sir William Martin or John Draper, the Masters of the Guild for 1485 and 1486—endeavours to explain the rights of the matter to a Merchant Taylor, who, without prejudice, may be described as truculent." Here we have the broad horizontal or processional arrangement, from which rise the upright lines of the banners and ensigns, in the manner of Mantegna or Poussin, and the pattern is here not so clearly counterfoiled as in the other two subjects. The predominating colour here again is red, but it is of a paler and more orange hue, counterbalanced by a paler blue of about equal weight, the darks predominantly tinged with grey blue.

A somewhat different note is struck by :

- (3) "A river procession to Westminster in 1453." (A wide panel).

"Over the heads of the flower-crowned musicians who are seated in the foremost barge, the spectator catches a glimpse of the pageant moving along the flood to Westminster. Boys make music on the high stern of another ship to the left, and the air is full of standards, flags and streamers as "of trumpets, shawns and other divers instruments all the way playing and making great melody."

Brangwyn throughout keeps to the dominant brilliant red, paling into salmon and orange colour, but this picture is in an altogether gayer key. Its composition is in the main a steep curve from the top left to the top right hand side. Wonderful seagreens and blues accompany the reds and pale pinks. Again the steadying perpendiculars will be found linking up the painting with the architecture : a comparison with the first sketch shows how wonderfully these uprights enhance the stability and architectural effectiveness of the design, for these uprights were at first not contemplated, the line of composition being a much flatter curve ending on the left before it reached the frame, and on the right almost half-way down the side, the background being formed by a huge cumulus cloud, where now is the fine architecture of the companies' barges.

An entirely different colour note is struck in :

- (9) "The Reception of General Monk at the Skinner's Hall, 4th April, 1660." (A wide panel).

"Monk is to be seen ascending the staircase in the background among officers of the Guild and the merchants who are his hosts or fellow-guests. Above him wait Masters and Wardens. In front, composed in a pale colour scheme of yellow, lilac and green, a gay troupe of trainbearers and an odd company of vagabonds and beggars are set in an accidental contrast, which amuses the gaze of the spectator. The latter are the uninvited guests and will not hear the panegyric spoken to 'The Deliverer,' but they will celebrate the occasion noisily in their own way."

The colour scheme that dominates this composition is not that of "Merry England," with its positive and unsophisticated manner of braving and solving the problems of existence ; it is the less joyous, but more refined, subtle and sophisticated hue of the "Merry Monarch's" England. One may say that here the artist practised *historical* accuracy in the decorator's sense, *i.e.*, he gives us the *appearance* of the times, its chromatic equivalent of historic truth. The composition is here, consequently, more intricate, consisting as it does, of a broken curve open to the top, from right to left, cut by a convex segment in the background. Here, too, Brangwyn allows the perpendiculars to disappear behind the frame. The darks of this picture are, as it were, scattered into fragments, so that there is far less light and shade in its pattern, which tells more like a silken tapestry. Perhaps the most interesting point is the key the subject-treatment gives to





THE RECEPTION OF GENERAL MONK AT THE SKINNERS' HALL, 4TH APRIL, 1660

Brangwyn's dramatic sense. Instead of presenting us with a portrait of General Monk and the worthies of the Skinners Company, perhaps somewhat after the fashion of Velasquez' "Surrender of Breda," one of the Spaniard's most "decorative" subjects, Brangwyn fills the foreground with three personages who seem unconcernedly to turn their backs on the spectator, whilst the General, scarcely distinguishable, is pushed uncere- moniously into the background. This manner of composition is in truth far more historically correct, *i.e.*, in agreement with probability than the "Surrender of Breda"—method which has the theatricality of a stage tableau. Brangwyn chooses the view of a person in the crowd, who catches glimpses of the great ones, but who himself remains part of the crowd. By such means the artist conveys a sense of actuality.

The same view point is maintained in the narrow panel flanking the foregoing, *viz* :

- (10) "Sir Thomas Pilkington's Ban-  
quet to King William the  
Third and Queen Mary, A.D.  
1684." (A narrow panel.)

If the spectator cares to fancy himself as a Trencher or Butler upon that occasion, he will be disappointed, for these serving- men would actually have been able to see Their Majesties and Sir Thomas himself guzzling Calipash and Calipee ; Brangwyn, however, imagined himself a humble citi- zen, glimpsing the scene only from afar, over the heads of their servers. The com- position is here amusing : it is Hogarth's "line of beauty" standing upright, but held securely to the architecture by a suc- cession of horizontals. Note that the end of the line of beauty—the great green flask, is not only "grasped" by the arches on either side, but runs close up to the framework, just as it runs in its lower part out of the frame.

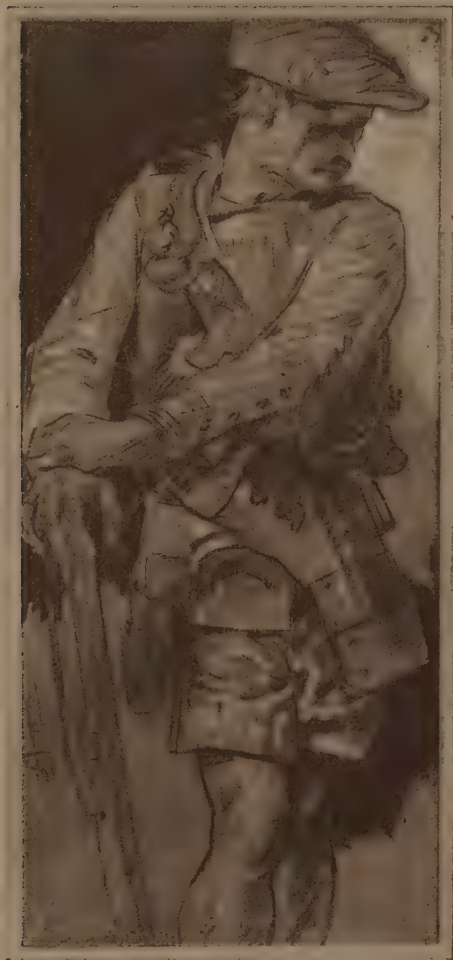


The dominant colour-scheme of this panel is a reddish yellow and salmon colour, relieved by dark blues and greens.

Throughout these decorations Brangwyn insists on presenting his subject matter subjectively. We are therefore not surprised to find the narrow panel that flanks the other side of the foregoing, representing a monk who administers the last consolation to a

dying Catholic, whilst several men at arms are watching the scene described as

- (6) "An Incident in the Defence of London Bridge by Sir Andrew Judd, A.D. 1554."  
(A narrow panel.)



The only thing that connects this panel with London is a suggestion of Old London Bridge in the background, but even that has to be taken almost on trust. The spectator is expected to be interested—if at all—in the human significance of the act and not in historical facts. In colour orchestration this picture is predominantly a harmony of blue greys and greens relieved by the light yellow uniform of the soldier and a spot of golden sunlight on the ground. The composition is again securely held in its place by the dominating verticals of the tree trunks and the soldier's pike.

The same subjective outlook is maintained in the narrow panel laboriously entitled :

- (1) "Skin Merchants or Skinners selecting furs and pelts at the City Mart in the days before the Guild of Corpus Christi received its Charter." (A narrow panel.)







THE GRANTING OF THEIR CHARTER TO THE SKINNERS' COMPANY,  
BY EDWARD III, MARCH 1ST, 1327. PANEL AT 'THE SKINNERS' HALL'.

To quote Mr. Warwick Draper again :

" . . . . here amongst the great piles which men have hauled and overhauled for inspection, as now in a carpet market of Persia or Turkey, the early Skinners are inspecting and making bargains, while a tanner sits munching his apple in the foreground."

Brangwyn's keen sense of humour has made him give more importance to the apple-munching tanner than to the worthy Skinners, bent upon the old, old "skin-game."

In composition and in colour this picture is exquisite ; the brilliantly red cap of the man on the right throws into relief the swarthinness of the figure on the left. The group in the centre is dark bluish grey, and these tones are relieved by the salmon-pinks and warm yellows of the distance.

In the narrow panel on the opposite wall :

- (5) "The Founding of Tonbridge School by Sir Andrew Judd, 1553,"

the artist has followed older methods by placing a scholar, as a symbol, in the foreground.

" . . . In Mr. Brangwyn's panel, one wistful lad of the people, clasping the model of that world whose possibilities lie open for his handling, sits dreaming at the conclave of his elders. Sir Andrew Judd, perhaps Sir Thomas White with him, is showing the Letters Patent of the School's Charter to a group of Skinners. An hour-glass stands on the table, but the sands of time are innumerable. Flowers and the rolled parchments of wisdom, and the lute of music's charm these symbols of the real riches, are strewn about the boy who shall learn these uses in the Schools of Tonbridge and of Life itself."



Mr. Draper has done all his explanatory work ingeniously well, but this description seems "to go" with the picture far more satisfactorily than the author's other descriptions. This is hardly the author's fault. Brangwyn has here used decoration with true allegory. The Symbolism here is pertinent; historical accuracy and narration of facts are here not required, and yet we are told more about the subject than in most of the others.

Colouristically this panel is again a *variation* on reds and grey blues, difficult to describe.

I have purposely reserved the mention of one of the most important panels to the last. It is :

(7) "A City Pageant in Olden Times." (A wide panel)

"In the shady foreground of the street, pass flower-decked trumpeters and standard-bearers, followed by rose-garlanded boys playing cymbals, whilst there march behind the boys on the left, players of mandolines and divers antique instruments. In the middle of the sunlit roadway, strewn with flowers, stroll players of bagpipes and pipers. Beyond is seen a gilded car filled with the figures of boys carrying the symbols of plenty. We may suppose that Mr. Brangwyn has painted a vision of Corpus Christi Festival in 1535-36, when Robert Davy, etc., etc. . . ."

So Mr. Draper. Speaking for myself: I do not want to suppose anything; I do not care what it is supposed to represent, and I do not believe that the artist cared either. It is a panel of exciting beauty. In its sustained rhythm it reminds one of the movement of the Parthenon frieze. It is akin to Mantegna's "Triumph of Cæsar," which presumably inspired it. It is far better than any processional of Poussin's known to me, for several reasons, but most of all on account of Brangwyn's much grander colour-vision, which here not only means colour, but in a subtle "overtone" sense seems to convey the very sound of music. The colour effect is one of brilliant light. The sun in warm yellows divides the left and right hand groups of the foreground, spreading wide in to the background. The shadowed or darker groups are a gamut of greys and blues and grey whites, relieved here and there by more positive purples and reds. Structurally the composition follows the old principle of the perpendicular reaching beyond the picture, crossed by a pronounced horizontal. This panel is not only, in my opinion, the best here, but one of the best Brangwyn has painted.





A CITY PAGEANT IN OLDEN TIMES



One last picture remains to be mentioned—the long narrow panel of the Music Gallery entitled :

(11) Harmony.

It is one of those comparatively rare works of his in which the charm of woman predominates in spite of the preponderating male element. It recalls, somehow, a Spanish scene, with its terraced low horizon and the distinctly Spanish type of the man on the right. Its composition, though steadied by the reaching of its lines beyond the frame, is yet less satisfactory because it lacks unity. In colour, however, it is the most delicate of the whole series : pale blues and salmon pinks form with the flesh-tints, beautifully painted, a harmony in a minor key.

Having considered each panel in detail, we now come to the most important point in decoration—the general impression of the whole scheme.

We note then, first of all, an impression of richness, sumptuousness, due to the co-operation of architecture and painting. The panels keep their place on the wall as if they were hanging draperies : had they been treated as pictures we should feel their wall-spaces as window spaces, and the Hall would have lost the sense of sheltered ease. This feeling of containment, so necessary in northern countries to contentment, is to a great extent due to the fact that the individual pictures are so designed that they follow one another along each side of the wall in a continuous easily flowing, *i.e.*, undulating line of composition along which the eye can travel with comfort ; and as the scale of the figures is identical, and the colour scheme harmonious, an æsthetic unity, such as was discussed in the first part of the book, is





AN INCIDENT IN THE DEFENCE OF LONDON  
(SKINNERS' HALL)

maintained, at any rate so far as that was possible; the Hall is in fact too high for its width, and the coloured window in the centre casts its glare along both side walls. One can really only see the pictures when they are specially, *i.e.*, artificially lit up; and London atmosphere has already so sadly darkened them that my descriptions, noted down in 1914 as here given, already seem unwarranted exaggerations of their chromatic power.



## XII. THE OFFICES OF THE CANADIAN NATIONAL GRAND TRUNK RAILWAY, COCKSPUR STREET, LONDON, S.W.

(TEMPERA, NEWMAN'S-COLOURS)



WHEN it is borne in mind that few of the things we buy, hire, use in the ordinary way of trade or business, are made for the purpose for which we purchase or use them, it is perhaps surprising only that they are as good and serviceable as—after all—we find them. Let me explain. Ostensibly a house is built to be lived in, a dress to be worn, a chair to be sat on, a ship to carry passengers or goods; a bank is founded for the convenience, an insurance company for the protection of their clients. Actually their purpose is an entirely different one. A house is built to be let, a dress to be sold, a chair to be bought, a ship, a bank, an insurance company for the profits they can make. In each case we get for our money as little as is compatible with the purpose. But Modern Commerce is a complicated thing and the modern business man has found that it not only *pays* to throw a sprat, so that he may catch a mackerel, but in some cases even to give actually and not only apparently *good* value. Moreover he has discovered that by organisation and pooling of capital it is possible to produce many things at small cost, instead of few things at great cost. It follows that modern commerce is not wholly *bad* but also that it is far from being really efficient, because instead of art to service it applies science to



the profit-making. There is, in fact, no room for art *in* commerce, but a great deal for science, since profit and loss, the governing considerations of "Trade," are considered only in their strictly scientific or mathematical aspect. The machine, *i.e.*, a scientific instrument, takes the place of the hand in *manufacture*, and "hands," in so far as they still have to be employed, are reduced to the status of machines. That at all events was the ideal of nineteenth century business. But the "human element," never eliminable, has had to be reckoned with. Not only has the *worker* claimed his *rights*, *i.e.*, a share in the profits, a claim that will not help him much; but the business man has discovered that the human element, instead of a drawback, can be and must be taken into account as a profit-making factor. He consequently uses it on the one hand to increase consumption, on the other to stimulate production. And how is this done? By the *superficial* application of Art. Art re-enters life by a back door. We have not yet reached the stage in which all things are done *with* art; but we have at any rate arrived at the stage in which the application of a branch of Art to life is found to be profitable. As convenient landmarks for this change we may fix two dates in the modern manufacture of Soap. When Messrs. Pears employed a President of the Academy for the purpose of increasing their sales, which the publication of Millais' "Bubbles" so effectively did, æsthetics entered into life far more successfully than with the efforts of the Gothic revivalists and their epigones. Again when "Sunlight Soap" began to be produced in a Garden City, the vital quality of æsthetics was recognised, and has since become a real factor in life. Art is still only a consumption and production increasing stimulant in Modern Commerce, but even so it is the leaven. The miscellany of "works of art" which find their way into modern art exhibitions, and more or less moribund, out of them again, must not be confused with the vital activities just referred to.

Brangwyn, unlike other artists, has always been an enthusiastic supporter of the vital activities to which art can be put, and in this spirit he decorated the Offices of the "Grand Trunk Railway" in Cockspur Street with a Frieze that both in subject matter and treatment displays a vital connection with place and purpose.

The interior architecture and furniture of this office was designed by Sir Aston Webb. Entering from the street by a central door between two large light windows, one finds himself in a spacious semi-circular room forty

feet broad, fifty feet deep, eighteen feet high. Across the white marble floor, inlaid with a simple band of black marble, runs a mahogany counter, divided by a number of unequal narrow and wide panels, inlaid with a pattern of small white metal "tesserae," the wider panels bearing alternately the monogram of the Company. The wall at the back has a leaded window, the remainder being covered with mahogany panelling, dull in finish, carefully considered in proportion, and simple and dignified in effect. I have only one fault to find: The ceiling with its clumsy joists is too low and too heavy. Under this ceiling, thirteen feet from the floor, and above the rich brown mahogany, runs Brangwyn's Frieze, five feet high, striking a soft grey-blue note in contrast with the warm colour of the wood. The effect is that of tapestry and therefore especially suited to wood architecture. It is painted in tempera handled with the freedom of oil.

The subject of the painting is "The Introduction of European Civilisation into the Country of the Red Indian," symbolised by the building of the great Transcontinental Railway. We are shown this work in various stages, beginning on the left with the "uncivilised" natives and their squaws and children and wigwams, ignorant of the fate that is to befall them and their country. We next see prospectors viewing the unpromised land. Next comes the peace-treaty and the planning of the Railway, and finally European settlers felling trees, with a bridge and a railway engine in the background.

Brangwyn has done his work with great compositional invention and a particularly pleasing treatment of landscape. Yet the effect is, as I have said, marred by the heavy ceiling, which seems to require some visible architectural means of support.



### XIII. DECORATION FOR THE NEW COURT HOUSE, CLEVELAND, OHIO

1912

(OIL)

1914



THE decoration of the Grand Trunk Railway Office brought Brangwyn indirectly into touch with America. Three years later, *viz.*, in 1912, he was honoured with a commission from the Municipality of Cleveland, Ohio; and since then the Americans have not been remiss in their patronage. Brangwyn is indeed the ideal decorator for public buildings, as a compatriot of Puvis de Chavannes felt when he said :

“ Et quand on erre à travers les échantillonnages de peintures de nos édifices publics, Hotel de Ville, Petit Palais, Sorbonne, et autres lieux, on peut regretter que Frank Brangwyn ne soit pas de chez nous.”\* Which means that the Frenchman regrets that Brangwyn, since he is not a Frenchman, is not available for such jobs in France. Fortunately Brangwyn belongs to a country which leaves him ample time and opportunity to supply the needs of the rest of the world. It's an ill wind . . . .

\* Maurice Guillemot, in “ Art et Décoration,” October, 1909.









KING JOHN SIGNING MAGNA CHARTA. FIRST SKETCH OF  
THE PANEL FOR THE NEW COURT HOUSE, CLEVELAND, OHIO



As to the American attitude towards Art, I may have to touch upon this subject again, and perhaps not quite so appreciatively : meantime it is worth while reminding English readers of a different spirit that is to be found abroad.

Situated on Lake Erie, at the mouth of the Cuyahoga river, with unusually wide streets and shady avenues, Cleveland, the "Forest City," is one of the most beautiful, best planned and best governed cities of the United States, a contention in proof of which the fact may be adduced that she has spent no less than £5,000,000 on "grouping" her Public Buildings : a mall six hundred feet wide runs from the Post Office and Library down to the City Hall and Court House, standing at a height of over seventy-five feet above and overlooking the lake. The keen and intelligent interest and pride her citizens take in their city is demonstrated further by the commission they gave Brangwyn to decorate their Court House.

The subject they chose for this purpose shows that the City is proud of English Tradition : "King John signing Magna Charta," formerly the greatest event in English History. "The Keystone of English Liberty" has since lost much of its significance.

For the sake of Brangwyn's painting, I must refresh the reader's memory by quoting from Green :

"Nursing wrath in his heart, John bowed to necessity and called the Barons to a conference on an Island in the Thames between Windsor and Staines, near a marshy meadow by the riverside, the meadow of Runnymede. The King encamped on one bank of the river, the barons covered the flat of Runnymede on the other. Their delegates met on the 15th of June in the Island between them, but negotiations were a mere cloak to cover John's purpose of unconditional submission. The Great Charter was discussed and agreed to in a single day. . . ."

"By the Treaty as settled at Runnymede a council of twenty-four barons were to be chosen from the general body of their order to enforce on John the observance of the Charter, with the right of declaring war on the King should its provisions be infringed, and it was provided that the Charter should not only be published throughout the whole country, but sworn to at every hundred mote and town-mote by order from the King."



“ ‘They have given me four-and-twenty Over-Kings ’ cried John, in a burst of fury, flinging himself on the floor and gnawing sticks and straw in his impotent rage.”



How did Brangwyn transcribe this event into the terms of his art ?

The space he had to cover was an arched wall—fifty feet long and some twenty feet in height, his painting measuring fifteen feet. The centre of the wall is broken by a doorway, which cuts up the space at his disposal and curtails its artistic possibilities, though it furnishes a fresh proof of his inventive and decorative faculty. If we examine his first sketch we find that he imagined one long continuous group, the Barons being hardly separated from the King and his party—the background is formed by two dark masses of tall trees and the tents of the Royal group. The colour-scheme is accordingly mainly based on an interplay of red, crimson and yellows in contrast with the dark green foliage, the dark blue sky and here and there a blue note in the foreground.

This first sketch shows no doorway.

In the second sketch the colour-scheme has been more or less finally settled and is founded mainly on two rich red notes on each side of the painting round which cool greens, blue and yellows of various intensity range themselves. But the line of composition differs in that the foreground of the right side is silhouetted against lights, and the left side against darks. The space above the doorway shows a clouded sky but no trees, so that the whole composition is distinctly cut in two.

In its final form the painting is united with the architecture by a great number of vertical tree trunks and is thus enormously strengthened. The horizon is raised, which gives a line of great horizontal strength. As is



STUDY FOR KING JOHN SIGNING MAGNA  
CHARTA. CLEVELAND, OHIO)









STUDY FOR KING JOHN SIGNING MAGNA  
CHARTA. (CLEVELAND, OHIO).

usual, Brangwyn fills the immediate foreground with flowers and with other brilliantly coloured objects. And now we see the story of the picture quite well. On the right is King John, looking surly and distrustful as he hesitates to put his hand to the great Charter upon his knees, whilst Stephen Langton and the Archbishop of York seem to be persuading him to do as he is asked. Around him are the Bishops and his followers. On the left is the group of the Barons, whilst boatmen are bringing refreshments from the riverside. A jester and a servitor are discussing the event on this side, whilst soldiers are guarding a great chest in which these important documents are to be preserved. So far the scene may almost be termed realistic: only the two shield bearers on either side of the doorway remind us that the whole episode is but a magnificent piece of decoration.

The execution of this great painting occupied Brangwyn nearly two years.

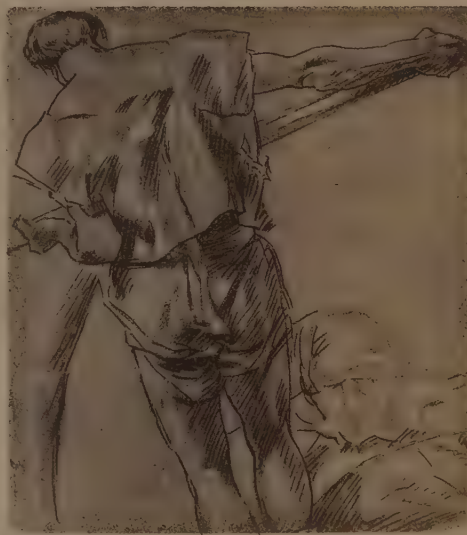


## XIV. THE CARPENTERS' HALL PANEL

(OIL)

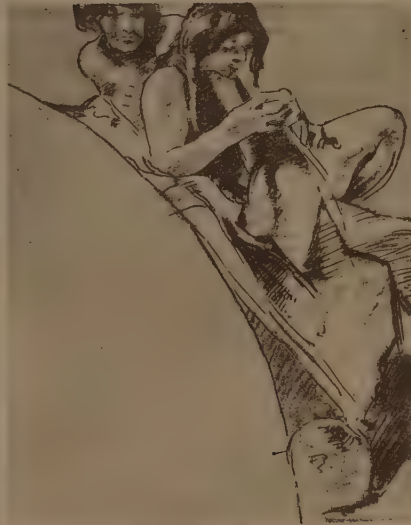
THE room in the Carpenters' Hall which Brangwyn was commissioned to decorate with a painting is panelled in dark brown oak. A row of tall windows on one of the long walls lets in a side light, whilst the fireplace which occupies one of the short walls is somewhat darkened. It consists of a good carved overmantel of seventeenth century workmanship, of which Brangwyn's painting now forms part. The latter is held by a gilt bevel in position, with the disturbing result that at first sight one only sees the gilt frame work; the picture itself remaining as it were part and parcel of the dark brown oak. Aware of this, the Carpenters' Company have made a special lighting arrangement which can be turned on to illuminate this painting, with somewhat alarming consequences, for the moment the light shines, the gilt bevel practically disappears and a cascade of brilliant reds and yellows tumbles out of the wall. The decoration has ceased to be a decoration and has become the principal thing in the room. That was neither Brangwyn's intention, nor is it sound æsthetics.

The subject representing "The Master of the Carpenters' Company embarking on the Company's barge to take part in a Pageant" is founded, colouristically, on a favourite formula of Brangwyn's, namely a gamut of yellows passing over a harmony of reds contrasted with blues of various strengths from the deepest and richest ultramarines to soft bluey greys. In its "natural" *i.e.*, unlighted state it just forms, as it is meant to do, a



part of the general decoration of the room, a break in the panelling none the less welcome because it is, in spite of the richness and purity of the colours, unobtrusive. But the moment the light is thrown on to it, the decoration becomes a "picture" and invites such questions: Is that Old London Bridge? What ships are they? Which is the Master?—the Man in Black coming down into the Barge, or the Man in Red who occupies a more prominent position? And we are told that unless the Master happened to be an Alderman he would not wear a red cloak. We become interested in the man with a bare back and wonder why he wears such fearfully dilapidated breeches; we seek associations and symbolic references where there are none, and become involved in discussions which are beside the point. And the point is this: a decorative Panel, or a series of such, as those in the Skinners' Hall, which are also artificially lighted, and where the daylight is certainly very poor, is robbed of its purpose when a prominence is given to it artificially for which it is not naturally intended. The practice seems almost as ridiculous as if one were to fix a light to the underside of a table in order to display the beauty of the pattern of an Oriental carpet.

On the other hand it may be argued that if the painting does not tell as a light spot on the wall, then it has failed in another respect: it is negligible as a picture. One cannot, however, have it both ways; a painting is either a decoration or a picture, it cannot be both—whatever the general opinion which mixes the two divergent purposes up, may hold—because the æsthetic units of each one are different. The decorative unit is not the painting but the whole room; the pictorial unit is not the whole room but the painting and that only.





## XV. GHENT EXHIBITION. LLOYDS' REGISTER

1913

DINING ROOM AND OVERMANTELS (TEMPERA)

**C**OMMISSIONED to decorate the Dining room at Lloyds' Register, for which body the artist had already executed three panels as overmantels in 1903 and 1907, Brangwyn had the opportunity of using nine of the panels at the Ghent Exhibition of 1913. The effect in each case differed, because at Ghent the room was entirely designed by the artist himself, whilst in London of course he had to adapt the paintings to the already existing architecture.

The Brangwyn room at Ghent was specially erected with the Library of the Board of Trade, also designed by him. It had, like the room for which the decorations were ultimately destined, a Barrel ceiling, forming an arched terminal wall, some twenty-four feet high. Two-thirds of this wall were occupied by the dominating pictorial lunette which was subserved by a series of paintings running frieze-like along the side walls, at a height of about eight feet from the ground, and under the shadow of the cornice which supported the sky-lighted roof. Each panel, measuring nine feet by five, *i.e.*, a little over half the size of the lunette, divided from its neighbour by a plain flat pilaster, was yet designed as part of a single band united by the dark blue of the sky line and leading up to the great decoration of the end wall, the scale of the figures in the nine side panels being identical with that of the figures in the foreground of the lunette. The compositional unity thus obtained was further emphasised by the subject matter of the





TEMPERA PANEL FOR THE ROOM AT THE GHENT EXHIBITION.



whole series, which represented or rather symbolised "Work" *e.g.*, fruit-porters, rug-porters, beer-porters, tea- and sugar-, meat- and pottery-porters, curios- coal- and timber-porters dominated by that type of worker upon whom our sea-borne trade ultimately depends : the " Boilermakers."

The setting of these pictorial decorations was here thought out with equal care. The roof, ornamented with incised lozenges, was painted a deep blue—echoing the sky line of the panels—powdered with silver gold stars. Instead of the heavy wood panelling and furniture at Lloyds, the walls were of a grey-gold coloured plaster, matched by a table and armchairs made of Circassian wood inlaid with walnut, with which a rug harmonised. All these things were likewise designed by Brangwyn. The total impression was one of restfulness in spite of the brilliant local colours of the paintings ; but this effect depended as much on the proportions of the room as on the quiet setting.



As to the individual panels, it is to be regretted that the large lunette no longer forms part of the scheme but has, like so many other good things in modern art, found its way to Tokyo into Mr. Matsukata's Collection. It is to be regretted only because this painting is one of Brangwyn's finest and most daring compositions. The subject explains itself. A huge ship's boiler, here illustrated, is being got ready to be hoisted by a crane in the background, whilst, at the same time, it is receiving its last rivets. On the left a group of men are seen at work upon a great iron bar, whilst on the right a foreman is giving, with the aid of a plan, instructions to his assistants. The background



is occupied by cranes, scaffoldings, machinery and furnaces. Since Menzel, many modern artists have attempted similar subjects, and amongst Brangwyn's youngest contemporaries are several who have made the "pattern" of industrial machinery and building the peg for æsthetic "emotion." Brangwyn's decoration is conceived in a different spirit, it expresses the romantic rather than the realistic or the intellectually æsthetic aspect of industrialism. Nevertheless the manner in which Brangwyn has emphasised the cubic and geometric elements of machinery and set them into the space he had to cover, allies him much more closely to the younger than to the photographic realism of the older generation.

In their ultimate situation these panels are in many respects not nearly as satisfying as the room in Ghent. The Dining room at Lloyds has it is true, also a barrel-ceiling, but the span is flatter, the walls lower, and the ribs of the vaulting are consequently more conspicuous. They divide the frieze on each side into five compartments of unequal proportion, *i.e.*, equal in height but not in width. One of the arched end walls is here occupied by an elaborate recessed chimney piece and fireplace, the other is decorated with a new lunette representing a long group of dock labourers.





A PORTION OF THE LUNETTE FORMING  
PART OF THE DINING ROOM AT LLOYDS.



This lunette, like the other, is still the best of the series. I doubt whether any living painter could have filled the space with equal success and ingenuity, and as to the Old Masters, they were in the Early Renaissance too literal and in the High-Renaissance too much obsessed with perspectival and anatomical science and allegorical devices to have adapted frank naturalism to decoration. Brangwyn has here managed to combine the human element with the geometrical element of barks, barrels and packing-cases, derricks and funnels, so as to form an æsthetic composition that to the uninitiated presents the appearance of unvarnished realism.

But because this lunette is so successful, it throws the shortcoming of some of the side panels into greater relief. In several of these—"Fruit Porters" is probably the worst offender—the dock labourers pose with the consciousness of a Phryne before her judges. Added to this is the further disadvantage that the paintings are here too close to the eye and therefore demand a greater degree of finish than was necessary in the position they occupied at Ghent.

The total effect, however, taking in the dark blue ceiling, the silvery gold ribs of the vaulting, the dark panelling and the red and blue Turkey carpet, is nevertheless excellent, though the artist himself was never really satisfied with this particular "job"—for several reasons, which need not here be entered into, as they have more to do with finance than with æsthetics.

There remains one interesting question.

Having regard to the fact that the Dining room at Lloyds is frequented by people whose life and daily bread is connected with the docks and their merchandise and men, no subject matter could be more appropriate than that which Brangwyn chose. Was he therefore justified? Propriety, fitness, suitability of subject matter with purpose is without a doubt an elementary law of æsthetics. Yet had he substituted for these types of





troublesome trades unionism, the chorus from a musical comedy, or, better still, a "Jovial" company of Olympian Goddesses, I have no doubt he would have satisfied Lloyds' Diners more. And I am not so sure that they could be blamed for such a "lack of taste," least of all by æstheticians who themselves can often see no more than an "escape from life" in Art. The right thing is often enough the wrong thing from another point of view. "The Skin Game" is a good play, but those who act it in life do not like to see it acted in art; it worries them. Yet if you will only consider the point dispassionately, much of the greatest art of former ages was intended to harass rather than to please.

As we are discussing Lloyds' Decorations, two pictures which the artist painted for this company and which are used as overmantels may also find mention here. One is "Queen Elizabeth going aboard the Golden Hind at Deptford," the other "Blake's Return after the capture of the Plate Ships." Both are fine paintings,\* the Queen Elizabeth being a particularly happy composition, both in colour and design, which matches the oak panelling of the room with much success. "Blake's Return," however, does not come off quite so well æsthetically. The painting, framed in black, is intended to decorate a room all red marble and gold. To the æsthetically sensitive there is always something incongruous in a frame that is not firmly planted on the wall, because the frame moulding is really, or rather should always be considered as part of the architecture, and not as part of the picture. But if habit has hardened us in the case of ordinary pictures, an overmantel is definitely a part of interior architecture. Here, however, Brangwyn's panel in common with the rest of the paintings is, as I saw it, suspended and not "planted"; moreover the ornamentation of this interior is too big and massive for its scale, with the result that the decorative effect of this picture is marred.

\* The former of 1903, the latter of 1907; both reproduced and discussed by Mr. Shaw Sparrow, F.B., and his Work: Kegan Paul, 1915.





"WATER." ONE OF THE PANELS IN  
THE PANAMA PACIFIC EXPOSITION.

## XVI. THE PANAMA PACIFIC INTERNATIONAL EXPOSITION, "MURALS"

(FLAT OIL ON ABSORBENT CANVAS PREPARED BY THE ARTIST)

**P**ERHAPS, after all, the Great American Exhibition of 1914, blighted by the eruption of the European conflagration, is destined to mark the commencement of a new era. Klio, turning over a new page and beginning it with a description of this "wonderful show" has probably written at the end of her preceding chapter an ominous "Exit Europa."

I have not seen the Exhibition, but if it was as good as its descriptions sounded, it must have been very good indeed. We are not here concerned with political and commercial questions, though from either point of view the San Francisco Exhibition may be deemed to have inaugurated an as yet scarcely imaginable change in the balance of power between the Eastern and Western hemispheres. What, however, does interest us are the artistic aspects which it presents. We cannot do better than give a short excerpt from Ben Maccomber's Guide to "The Jewel City," because it gives exactly what one wishes to know.

"The artistic quality which distinguishes this Exposition above all others in America or Europe rests on two outstanding facts: the substantial unity of its architectural scheme, and its harmony of colour, keyed to Nature's colouring of the landscape in which it is placed. The site furnished the clue to the plan, co-operation made possible the great success with which it has been worked out.

"'Centuries ago,' said George W. Kelham, Chief of Exposition Architecture, 'before the modern age of advanced specialization was dreamed of, had an architect been asked to create an exposition, he would have been not only an architect, but painter, sculptor and landscape engineer as well. He would have thought, planned and executed from this fourfold angle, and I doubt if it would have even occurred to him to think of one of the arts as detached from another.' These words express the methods of the Exposition builders. The scheme adopted was a unit, in which all of the



Arts were needed, and in which they all combined to a single end. Each building, each court, every garden and large mass of foliage, was designed as part of a balanced composition. To make the landscape an integral part of the Exposition picture by fitting the Exposition to the landscape, was the common aim of architect, colourist, sculptor and landscape engineer. The Mediterranean setting offered by a sloping beach on the shore of the Golden Gate suggested, as most capable of high expression of beauty, the scheme of a City of the Far East, its great buildings walled in and sheltering its courts. The colouring of earth, sky and sea furnished the palette from which tints were drawn alike for palaces and gardens."



Even if this ambitious scheme had failed completely it would still have been worth the attempt, for have we not here for the first time an attempt to show Man as the absolute master over nature, bending her as it were to his will and for no other purpose than to exhibit his mastery. One should note here particularly the last sentence, which makes it clear that artistic ambition could go no further than to conceive the Exposition not only as an architectural but even as a pictorial unit. What must astonish us, however, is the strong strain of symbolism running through the whole planning of the Exhibition. The following description of "The Court of the Ages" will give an idea of this, and serves at the same time to acquaint us with the milieu in which Brangwyn's eight enormous "murals" (as the Americans *will* call wall-paintings) were destined to be seen. Mullgardt, the architect of this Court, conceived it as a "Sermon in Stone." "The Court," he says, "is an historical expression of the successive Ages of the



"EARTH"—PANAMA EXPOSITION



"FIRE"—PANAMA EXPOSITION



world's growth. The central fountain symbolises the nebulous world with its innate human passions. Out of a chaotic condition came Water (the basin) and Land (the fountain) and Light (the Sun supported by Helios and the electroliers). The braziers and cauldrons symbolize Fire. The two sentinel columns to the right and left of the Tower symbolize Earth and Air. The eight paintings of the four corners of the ambulatory symbolize the Elements of Earth, Air, Fire and Water. The central figure in the North Avenue symbolizes 'Modern Time listening to the Story of the Ages.'

"The decorative motifs employed on the surrounding arcade are sea-plant life and its animal evolution. The piers, arches, reeds and columns bear legendary decoration motifs of the transition of plant to animal life in the forms of tortoise and other shell motifs; kelp and its analogy to the prehistoric lobster, skate, crab and sea urchin. The water-bubble motif is carried through all vertical members which symbolize the Crustacean Period, which is the second stratum of the Court.

"The third stratum. . . ."

But the reader must not be wearied with the continued description of a scene which he cannot himself inspect. Nevertheless it is worth while pondering. Can it be said that this sort of symbolic decoration is in accordance with the modern spirit. Would the average Exhibition visitor bother himself with unravelling the mysteries of all its symbolic significance. If the answer is in the negative, then we must look upon it as so much love's labour lost. And indeed one is inclined to think that it was a waste of energy. Symbolism as part and parcel of decorative effect is permissible when the symbols

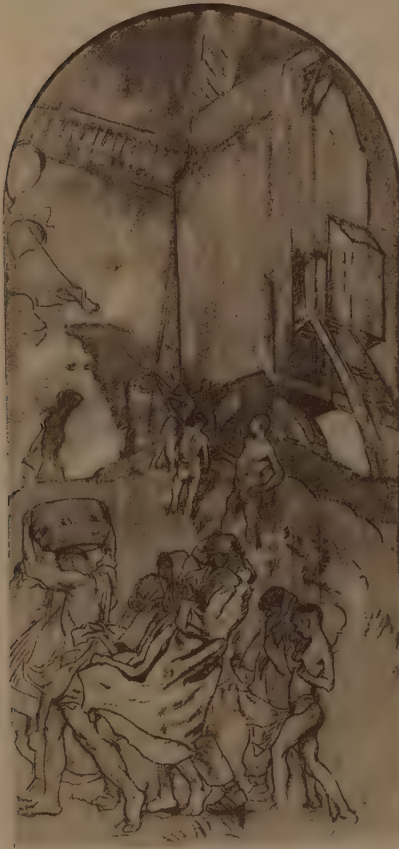




are permanent and conventional—that is to say when every “faithful” was expected to learn their fixed and permanent interpretation, as was invariably the case with the symbolical Art of past ages. But such convention no longer exists, and indeed have we not got beyond this conception of Art’s function? Mullgardt’s description of his own work reads rather like an object lesson, and the fact that the “officials” “deemed the name not in accord with the contemporaneous spirit of the Exposition” and called it “The Court of Abundance” instead of “The Court of Ages,” as the architect had desired, rather points to a justification of our doubts. The

Modern Spirit demands of Art that it should fulfil one primary condition: it should appeal to the eye directly—it should need no “title” or other explanatory matter. We shall see immediately what bearing this has on Brangwyn’s work for this “Court of Abundance.”

The artist was commissioned to paint eight pictures which were to be placed in groups of two in the four corners of the ambulatory. “It is unfortunate,” says Mr. Maccomber, “that these pictures, far and away the best in the decoration of the Exposition, have been hidden in the corners of a Court. The canvases are bold, free, vast as the elements they picture. They need space . . . People are not going in to see them as they should, and so are missing one of the chief joys of the Exposition—the masterpieces of one of the world’s greatest living painters.” Yet these paintings were twenty-five feet high and twelve feet wide—and their colouring was like the full choir in Handel’s “Creation”—they must have fairly sung out from their four corners. Earth—Air—Fire—Water—such was his theme, and





"WATER"—PANAMA EXPOSITION



"FIRE"—PANAMA EXPOSITION



to each subject he devoted two canvases. So huge were they in his studio that he could not stretch them to their full height, but had to paint them bit by bit—yet no one would guess it; they hang together from the dome-shaped tops down to their bases—each forming a complete composition in itself but linked with its immediate companion in subject and withal in scale of figures and in arrangement.

To appreciate exactly what Brangwyn's Art means, one must try to realise how others might have approached such a task. As the architect may be presumed to hold the most legitimate as well as the most definite ideas on the most suitable form of decoration for the architecture he himself has designed, *his* criticism may usefully be given. In an interview published in the San Francisco "Bulletin,"\* Mr. Mullgardt, who built the "Court of Ages" says: "What a chance Brangwyn had to do something new with this magnificent subject (Air). At last, after centuries of effort, men are actually conquering the air. They've learned to fly. They've become birds. Now why didn't Brangwyn give a pictorial expression of that miracle. Why didn't the artist have as much sense as the man of affairs, who pays Art Smith to come out here and fly before the multitude?" Is this legitimate art criticism? When Michelangelo carved the figure of a nude young man and called it "A Slave," would a critic of the Cinquecento have been justified in finding fault with it because the latest up-to-date slaves of the time did not go about nude and were, moreover, of the negro type? Or when Rodin modelled his "Penseur," should we cavil at him because a modern thinker generally wears a more or less starched collar. Brangwyn's theme was "Air" and not its conquest; moreover he would naturally dwell upon the immediate rather than the mediate meanings; but last and not least, the sunny court under a Californian sky, which the artist was asked to decorate, suggested to him—spontaneously—a more abstract, a more general treatment of the subject. Brangwyn drew natural human figures in natural surroundings and he kept to his device throughout. Had he not done so he would have marred the unity of his scheme. "Art Smith flying before, or rather above the multitude" might make an interesting snapshot, but it is probable that the spectator would have lost the "joy" which these decorations impart and would have conceived "Art Smith" as the centre of interest. That this danger is very real a further remark of the architect's proves. Having conceded the points raised for Brangwyn

\* May 25th, 1915.



by the interviewer, "the brilliant use of colour, the dramatic grouping, the fineness of characterisation," Mr. Mullgardt objects: "He's too monotonous. Though his groups are of different periods, some of them ages apart, they're all essentially alike and the figures are even dressed alike . . . Why should he (the Artist) neglect the present, the greatest of all ages?" Why not? Supposing Art Smith favoured a green tie and check trousers, must Brangwyn introduce this modern costume, lest he be condemned as despising the present. All Brangwyn's decorations, and these in particular, are intensely modern—no one could possibly mistake them for anything but modern, though the subject matter is of no particular period. It does not seem to occur to the critic that what he calls monotonous is a necessary desire for *unity*. "Why should an artist limit himself unnecessarily when he has all the ages to draw on?" That *unnecessarily* begs the question. Every great artist works under self-imposed limits—it is these limits which constitute style. Brangwyn of all painters was quite capable of making a Flying Man picturesque, but he simply did not choose to do it. He considered his limitation more appropriate. If Brangwyn painted Adam and Eve, his *way of painting them* would in itself prove that he was not neglecting "the present, the greatest of all Ages."

The truth of the matter is this; most people, even those that have received an art education, look upon painting as a species of literature. All the wonderful "symbolism" of the architect and his Court of Ages has nothing to do with the modern conception of Art. The *meaning* of the decoration is not subservient to the purpose or *Art*, it is distinct from it; and yet, in another sense, the work of Art depends entirely upon its meaning—*i.e.*, on the "feeling" or "sensation" it imparts. Brangwyn's task was to provide an open-air decoration for a place that is bathed in a southern sun, a decoration moreover that was to be essentially stimulating, joyful, in a word attractive—it was indeed one of the attractions of the Exposition. Furthermore, it did not form part of one of the *machinery* halls; Fire—Air—Earth—Water were not to be shown as the slaves of Man, the Elements were not to be presented as parts of technology—but as elements of human physiology. Then how does Mullgardt's criticism apply? Not content with Brangwyn's choice of subject, the architect finds even more to cavil at: "Look at the way these fellows are holding their bows—with the left hand, presumably for the pictorial effect of the composition. Well, let that



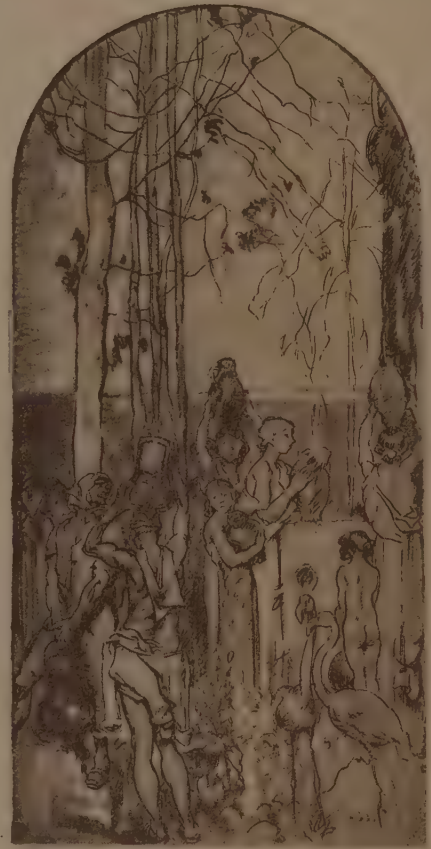
"EARTH"—PANAMA EXPOSITION

point pass. One fellow has sent his arrow. The other is holding his arrow between the forefinger and the middle finger. Well it won't go very far. The Indians know better. They let the arrow rest on the thumb to give it plenty of freedom to fly. One of those bows, by the way, has no string. Brangwyn probably thought it wouldn't be missed."

There would be no object in quoting all this from an ephemeral article in an American paper, but for the fact that it shows a lack of understanding, which is unfortunately generally prevalent. Of course Red Indians know more about bows and arrows than Brangwyn does—of course the arrow in Brangwyn's painting "won't go very far." Indeed it won't go at all—but fortunately that has nothing whatever to do with the question of decoration. People *will* read pictures as if they were diagrams; they will count the trees and miss the forest.

If Mullgardt's criticism rates Brangwyn because of his lack of *realism*, one can well imagine scores of critics who would blame the artist for his lack of *idealism*. Ugly faces, knotted fingers, muscly limbs, and entire absence of prettiness; allegories without allegorical figures, without goddesses and Olympians generally; no Cupids on clouds, no Phæton in the skies, no Juno with her peacocks.

Instead: flamingoes, and foxglove, and pumpkins, and wonderful cypresses and pergolas, and such an overwhelming wealth of human action, and heavenly clouds and sunshine and such a joy of colour, such a simple naive joy in pure and brilliant hues. There is no arguing about such things; one either feels them or one doesn't, and it is to be envied or pitied accordingly. The critic who comes





to such work with preconceived notions as to what is, or what is not legitimate art, careful execution, suitable decoration and so on, wears spectacles which blind his natural vision. Those who come after will know better. They will compare Brangwyn's work, perhaps, with all that has been done in the past, and they will know that not one of the Great Masters can be spared, and that Brangwyn was one of them.

As to the subjects themselves : The first canvas of the pair symbolising "Air" is composed in the following manner : On the edge of a forest, a party of half-naked men is hunting with bow and arrow. Tall, smooth tree-trunks, upon which moonlight and shadows play, tower beyond the dome-shaped tops. A covey of birds is seen flying through the wood into the open country. The companion picture is treated quite differently. Here a wooden windmill standing in a wheatfield stretches its wings into a thundery sky upon which the rainbow is visible. Naked boys are playing amidst the wheat and flying kites. Below the mill, threading their way through a green meadow, and quite in the foreground, a number of men, women and children, their loose garments blowing in the wind, are seen passing out of the picture. This group is silhouetted against the yellow cornfield, dark against light—counterpoised above by the sunlit mill seen against the dark thunderclouds.

The "Water" symbols consist of two canvases, in the first of which fishermen are hauling in the last net of the day. Again we have the verticals emphasised by the slender tree trunks foiled against a huge cumulus cloud and dark blue sky. What is perhaps the finest conception of the whole series is the second "Water" panel, called "The Fountain." Here a group of men, women and children, all of a nondescript epoch, are fetching and carrying water that springs from the fountain. This picture is a huge delight, a symphony in pure colours, from the delicate hues of the flamingoes standing amongst foxgloves in the foreground, and by the side of a tall red-capped water carrier, to the deep blue sky above. In the centre of the picture is seen a brilliant red jar carried aloft by a woman and singing out from the sonorous dark blue of the distant sea. The "Earth" subjects are riotously red, yellow, blue and orange coloured, sun-splashed and filled with strenuously working groups of men, women, boys and babies. It is interesting to note how Brangwyn has balanced this exuberant colour



symphony : in the " Fruit Pickers " we have a dark mass of trees counter-balanced in the opposite " Dancing the Grapes " by a bright sunlit wall. This wall is foiled against the dark blue sky reaching low down under the pergola, harmonised again by the warm yellow of " Fruit Pickers," which tell light against sky and trees in the companion picture.

In the " Fire " subjects Brangwyn solves the puzzle of composition in an ingenious manner : he uses the shape of the smoke to connect the figural parts with the high Dome of the canvases. In " Primitive Fire " the smoke is a slender stem uniting with the slim tree trunks. The group of the kneeling fire-kindlers in this picture is fine. It is interesting to note that in the centre of the human interest is a rough man offering an apple to the chubby infant he is holding on his arm—only Brangwyn would sacrifice the obvious *Mother and Child* theme here—in the " Industrial Fire " picture the female element is in the background, but the finely painted half dressed figure is felt as a welcome relief from the strenuous, naked bodies of the Fire Stokers. We have the word of eye-witnesses that the whole set of eight was " in sympathy with M. Guerin's colour scheme for the whole Exhibition "; and the only regret that they were not more easily visible. Brangwyn, by-the-bye, was the only artist who was commissioned to supply decorations without the stipulation that he should paint them on the spot, as was the case with the other decorations.





PANEL IN THE CHAPEL OF CHRIST'S HOSPITAL.

## XVII. THE DECORATIONS IN THE CHAPEL OF CHRIST'S HOSPITAL, WEST HORSHAM

(PURE EGG TEMPERA)

ART is often looked upon as something that ought to be encouraged for ethical reasons. It seems to be assumed that it radiates, in virtue of its *æsthetic* qualities, a refining educational influence. This pleasant conception, or rather misconception, a little experience of life rudely disturbs; some of the dullest and heaviest Bœotians one meets come out of houses that were built by Inigo Jones or the Brothers Adam, furnished by Boule, Meissonnier or Chippendale, and "decorated" with pictures by Van Dyck, Lely, Reynolds and Gainsborough. And again some of the worst offences against *æsthetics* are committed, in Italian Churches for instance, under the very nose, so to speak, of Giotto or Raphael.

A Van Dyck or a Gainsborough is to the family not a work of art but the memory of an ancestor, an "heirloom" which becomes a work of art only after it has passed through Christie's; and to the Faithful, a Giotto is first and foremost an "article of faith," an object of adoration, or a lesson in religion, with an ethical influence rather weaker than that of a "Holy Rood"-splinter or the "Tooth" of Buddha.

So when the old Christian artists decorated their churches, chapels and even the cells of their monasteries with paintings, they were not thinking of ART, but of religion, of adoration, edification and teaching: and this has been the purpose of religious art the world over. Is it not reported of the great Wu-Tao-Tzu, of the T'ang dynasty, that he painted "Purgatory" of such gloomy horrors as to make beholders sweat and their hair stand on end, themselves shivering all the time, though it may not be cold? It has caused men to seek after virtue and give up evil practices, after which who can say painting is only a small art?"\* as the twelfth century art critic Huang Po-ssu so wisely observed.

\* Herbert A. Giles: An Introduction to the History of Chinese Pictorial Art. Quaritch, 1918.



It is then hardly open to doubt that for the majority the purely æsthetic qualities of a picture exert only a subconscious influence, whilst the subject matter is of vastly greater, because of more direct and immediate, appeal.

Now I do not wish to imply that Wu-Tao-Tzu's hair-raising feat should have been attempted by Brangwyn in his Chapel decorations of the Blue Coat School at West Horsham, but I do say, very earnestly, that he was forced by the choice of subject matter made for him, to miss whatever chance pictures may have to influence character, "to make men seek after virtue," as Po-ssu has it.

The Chapel was built in Nineteen hundred and two ; the boys who worship there are children of the Twentieth Century : Hell, now that we have experienced "The Great War" can hold no more horrors for them, and it is not a boy's nature to covet, over-much, the joys of Heaven ; but if the subject of the Hereafter can, for such reasons be ruled out, one wonders why, with the solitary exception of one, only recently completed panel, the whole of the decorations had to be devoted to a dim, doubtful and irrelevant past.

The decorations are intended to illustrate "The Mission and Expansion of Christianity, beginning with the Acts and leading to the conversion of our own Islands, and Foreign Missionary work."

The very choice of such a theme, which reeks of mouldy pages instead of green leaves, shows a misunderstanding of the function of decoration.

Decoration is a form of poetry ; at least only in that form can it survive the onslaught of the Cinema, with its realism unapproachable by art.

Even assuming, however, that this was recognised and only *decoration* intended, surely the Bible contains better and more "decorative" subjects, stories more likely to appeal to the youthful mind, such as "The Days of Creation," "The Flood," "David and Goliath," "Samson," "The Walls of Jericho," "The Promised Land." If, on the other hand, the object was to teach and influence the young idea, one must be forgiven for suggesting that "The Acts," "The Fathers" and even the modern Missionaries are on the whole, less edifying than the Gospels.

It depends of course, but recent events seem to show that our "conversion" is not quite as complete as it might be. What a chance was there not here to emblaze the real *living* Truths enshrined in the Faith of Christ. Without difficulty sixteen subjects might have been found in the

Bible, subjects which would have stirred the imagination and fired the enthusiasm of youth. Nor would it be necessary to have touched the story of the Passion; there are plenty of themes which have scarcely been used even by the old masters, themes moreover which embody valuable lessons for our "enlightened" era. Exempli gratia: "Adam in the sweat of his brow"; "Cain and Abel"; "The Golden Calf"; "The Story of Job"; and of "The Good Samaritan," and of "The Rich Young Ruler"; or "Christ as the Children's Friend," or as the Enemy of "Moneychangers." Themes that are relevant, that would have had an immediate bearing upon the boys' life, are almost numberless. However, professional Christianity has different ideas on the matter, seeing that to the orthodox the letter is ever of greater importance than the spirit.

Perhaps I shall appear to have digressed. I shall be told that this book deals with ART, blessed word, and that therefore polemical remarks such as I have made are in bad taste. But art, as one must insist, is only a manner of doing and saying things; it is not the art, but what is done *with* it that matters. If the subject of a painting is connected with Church walls, decoration amounts to a sermon, if not in, then at least on stones; and when the artist is compelled to preach an indifferent sermon, however happy his oratory, then it is the "historian's" duty to point out who should bear the blame. There is, I repeat, only one panel which has any reference to the life of to-day, the sixteenth. This panel represents "Preaching in the East End." "Why the *East End*?" as Brangwyn at first, pertinently objected. The East End it is nevertheless, because its characters appeal to Brangwyn's conception and temperament.

And now to the work itself.

The Chapel of Christ's Hospital at West Horsham was designed, together with the rest of the buildings, by Sir Aston Webb and the late E. Ingress Bell. It is built in the Gothic style of red brick, faced with stone and



pointed with light mortar, the walls being uncovered also in the interior. The accompanying illustration shows the general structure and the position occupied by Brangwyn's sixteen panels. The first impression on entering the long narrow chapel is one of light and warmth, due to the tall windows on both sides and the tone of the red brick. The stalls and the wood work generally are a light "oiled" oak, not yet grey enough to be quite in contrast with the walls; but the one desirable contrasting note in the scheme—a cool-blue, equivalent in value to the red of the brick, is supplied by Brangwyn's decorations, in which it just sufficiently asserts itself throughout. The paintings run along both walls about sixteen feet from the ground and twenty-four feet from the fine dark brown "hammer beam" roofing; fourteen of the panels measuring seven feet by fourteen, whilst the two nearest the altar are of the same height but only half the width; all are executed with egg tempera colours on canvas prepared with a gesso ground, framed in oak on stretchers, and "marouflage" has probably for reasons of economy not been resorted to. However, even so, they ought to last for a century or two, one imagines, considering that canvasses by Titian and Veronese have lasted even longer.

True to a sound principle, Brangwyn has not only kept the figures in all panels to the same scale, and the colour-orchestration of the whole series to almost the same key (one or two are, owing to chemical differences, slightly richer in tone) but, what is of equal importance and more difficult of achievement: he has varied the composition in each and in such a manner that they follow one upon the other in agreeable diversity but without a break.

The subjects starting on the left of the entrance run in more or less chronological sequence towards the altar, and back again to the door; and as the eye wanders from one to the other the mind is more and more surprised by the extraordinary fertility of Brangwyn's invention. Each picture is alive, not so much through its subject matter, which latter is treated often with scant regard for accuracy, but with the pulsing quickness of line, form and colour. One must call to mind the solemn efforts of other modern painters, especially of those who, like Watts, Leighton, Puvis, Maddox Brown, had a real sense of mural decoration, in order to appreciate Brangwyn's achievement here. The others all seem too conscious of Art, too much imbued with the dignity of their labours. Brangwyn's work sings from the wall like the choir of the boys below. In both the melody



is sacred, but it is sung with gusto and to the accompaniment of much innocent worldly matter. Through all, or nearly all his compositions here, runs a vein of humour, and if the boys find a source of fun and delight in crooked noses, gnarled hands, strutting cranes, solemn camels, baskets of fruit and bottles of wine; if they seek likenesses between the venerable saints, hoary sinners and mischievous children on the wall and their living masters or companions, this is not what Brangwyn would resent. The artist created these paintings to delight the boys, to interest them in life and in vision, so that colour, design, pattern, together with "the story" might enter their souls and remain there as a subconscious asset. He wishes to make them regard Art as something the "human boy" should associate with realities and actualities, rather than as an occupation only fit for women and weaklings. In some of the pictures this insistence on the work-a-day world, this introduction and even preponderance of types which are anything but spiritual, children and youths who are far from beautiful, old men who have none of the dignity of age, he has possibly overshot the mark, and would have done so entirely in some cases but for the fact that the compositions and colour schemes are without exception of overwhelming dignity and beauty. On this account, it is not an exaggeration to say, Brangwyn's decorations here need fear no comparison with the work of the greatest masters of the past, if only for this one reason, that none of them conceived a scheme of such consistent continuity of design.

The subjects, each bearing an explanatory inscription, are ranged round the walls in the following order:

1. *Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice and spake.*

An Eastern scene, in which Peter, perhaps symbolically, turns his back on bottles of wine which play as prominent a part in the composition, as in the verses of the chapter they illustrate.

We see the Apostles, on the day of Pentecost, after the Holy Ghost had come down upon them "in cloven tongues like as of fire," but having left the "house where they were sitting," now standing as if still dazed with their amazing experience, and as if smarting under the accusations hurled at them—"These men are full of new wine."

"But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice and said unto them: 'Ye men of Judæa and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words:



“ ‘ For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day.’ ”

A weak opening which presently rises to the beautiful : “ And your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.”

Unorthodox as is Brangwyn's rendering, the Jew on the right and several heads of the apostles give the scene an extraordinary sense of reality, whilst the introduction of flowers and wine and fruit—in quaint baskets, historically justified as the episode happened on a feast day, helps to produce a magnificently decorative effect. I wish, nevertheless, that he had been a little kinder to the children. The composition is static and simple, the colour rather bluer than its neighbour. (Illustration faces page 109.)

2. *The Martyrdom of St. Stephen.* “ Lord lay not this sin to their charge.”



The immediate cause of this Saint's martyrdom, was his unfortunate desire to tell people the everlasting truth :

" Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost."

So they " gnashed on him with their teeth " and cast him out of the city and stoned him. " And Stephen called upon God and the Lord Jesus, and he kneeled down and cried with a loud voice ' Lord lay not this sin to their charge.' And when he said this he fell asleep."

Brangwyn has chosen the moment before the saint knelt and prayed, for we see only his bared back and bowed head hiding in sorrow rather than fear under his crossed arms.

Dramatic in composition, this picture is in tonality rather darker and richer than the foregoing and the following :

3. *And the men led Saul by the hand and brought him into Damascus.*



Brangwyn, disregarding the New Testament, which gives us to understand that Saul was a "young man," and tradition, which gives him a long beard in his age, makes of the blinded apostle an old clean-shaven Jew. As a matter of historical or traditional accuracy, then, this subject fails. But on the other hand the artist has here created a vision of the East of surpassing beauty. The intensely interesting treatment of the whole shows that he knows the East not only from hearsay. Cunning play with a great variety of Oriental textile pattern, makes the picture look curiously "modern." The rocking rhythm of the camels in the background with the white walls of Damascus behind them, however, gives the scene, despite its manifold inaccuracies, an air of actuality and truth likely to interest the youthful spectator especially.

4. *St. Paul shipwrecked.* "So it came to pass that all escaped safe to land."

"And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground, and the forepart stuck fast and remained immovable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves. And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out and escape. But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose, and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea and get to land; and the rest swam on boards and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass that they escaped all safe to land."

The boys seeking to unravel the biblical account of the episode from the pictorial representation here will have no easy task, and I confess I do not know which of the figures could readily be identified with the Apostle whom we but a moment ago encountered as an old man. It might be the almost naked ruffian, whom the people of Melita might, pardonably, mistake for a murderer; though actually it is the standing figure in the foreground.

Brangwyn's habit of representing biblical personages as ordinary, common types of the people is, nevertheless, more deliberate than might be assumed. "After all," he says, "the people around the Carpenter's Son cannot have looked like first cousins to Apollo and Venus," as the Renaissance in Italy tried to make out, and if beauty of person is only rarely mentioned in the Bible, ugliness, be it noted, is never mentioned at all. The great Christian primitives never made the mistake of the Greeks, whose wisest





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man was a striking proof of the fact that bodily beauty does not correspond to a beauty of mind or soul.

Brangwyn's temperament, which is not "classic," realises beauty as a different conception, as this panel so convincingly proves. "St. Paul shipwrecked" is one of the best compositions of this series, alike in design as in colour. The warm notes of yellows and reds and browns are beautifully contrasted with the blues and greens of sky and sea, whilst the greys from almost black to the tenderest pearly shades are cunningly distributed in such a manner as to bind the whole firmly together. This picture is one of the earlier ones, and also slightly deeper and richer in tone than the rest. The introduction of the birds in the foreground is a purely pictorial but happy invention due, in spite of the somewhat Japanesque treatment, more likely to a reminiscence from one of Raphael's famous cartoons in South Kensington.

5. *The Arrival of St. Paul at Rome* : "He thanked God and took courage."



“ And so we went toward Rome, and from thence, when the brethren heard of us they came to meet us as far as Appii forum and the Three Taverns ; whom when Paul saw, he thanked God and took courage.”

So the Acts xxviii. 14, 15.

Brangwyn, as usual, makes the text only a pretext, we must therefore not too carefully enquire as to the identity of the persons seen. One of the brethren, laying his arm upon the shoulders of the apostle is pointing out to him the palace of the Cæsars across the Tiber. Near them on the left is a group of Jews, some of whom are ready to “ believe the things he was to speak,” whilst the somewhat sinister figure advancing on the right looks like “ a backbiter, hater of God, spiteful, proud.”

The composition, in detail fine and dramatic, is as a whole perhaps a little *unfinished*, seeing that it ends “ *sostenuto*,” with the figure on the right almost in line with the principal group. The “ full stop,” such as presented by the Cranes on the right in the “ Shipwreck,” or the crouching figures on the right of “ St. Stephen,” is missing.

6. *The Conversion of St. Augustine at Milan*, A.D. 387. “ *Take read ! Take read !* ”

Torn in endless seemingly hopeless combat with himself, a rich, young and cultured “ intellectual,” St. Augustine, was on the verge of a nervous breakdown, when, accompanied only by his friend Alypius, he fled into a little garden which adjoined his house ; and there, almost demented with bodily and mental torture and anguish, he suddenly became aware of a child’s voice, whether a boy’s or a girl’s he knew not. The voice chanted, child-like, a little sing-song : “ Tolle lege, Tolle lege—Take read, Take read.” The words stirred him unaccountably. He tried to remember whether they were part of a child’s game, perhaps. Then the conviction dawned upon him that it must be the command of the Lord, bidding him take up the Bible and read. He hastened to fetch the Holy Book and opening it, read the words upon which his eyes first rested :

“ Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.”



Thus was St. Augustine converted, and he was only thirty-three years old when this occurred.

Brangwyn gives us the picture of an old monk sitting in a Garden, surrounded by a choir of singing children ; who could identify this picture with its legend ?

Was the artist justified in availing himself of so much poetic licence ?

Amply, I think, because illustration and decoration are two different things. Assuming that the subject was chosen for him, how was he otherwise to bring it into consonance with the rest of the panels. To be accurate, he would only have been permitted one, or at most, two figures, *viz.* : St. Augustine, still unconverted and therefore not a monk, and his friend Alypius. The child that converted him was invisible : it is expressly stated that he did not know whether the voice was a boy's or a girl's. How then could he have fitted this panel in with the rest. That was the problem.



He solved it by boldly transferring it into a dream-vision of the Saint, a "poem" on the purifying power of childish innocence, symbolised here not only by the children, but also by the "garland" of lilies.

This panel is as in sentiment (only rivalled by one other) so in colour and composition one of the best of the whole series—light and subtle in form and tender in feeling.

7. *St. Ambrose training the Choir in his Church at Milan.* A.D. 385.

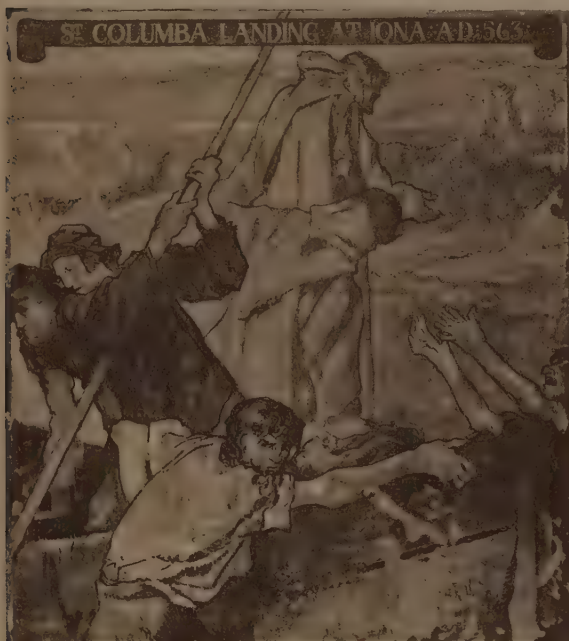
St. Ambrose was one of those who gave the Church the dignity and magnificence of ceremonial which has gained her more converts than her Dogma. "The marble walls shine," complained St. Jerome, "the ceilings glitter with gold, the Altars with precious stones, although the true servants of Christ are not thus resplendent." To this glitter of concrete things, St. Ambrose added the magic of song, "borrowing the art of antiphonal singing from the East."



Brangwyn's presentation of the subject requires no comment. It is a fine, beautifully balanced, composition of greys and gold and grey blues, from which the red cap and shoes of the young man and the red scull cap of the old St. Ambrose in the foreground sing out, much to the advantage of this panel, which is placed below a stained glass window that contains much brilliant red, that would otherwise kill the painting.

I may here add that in my opinion the stained glass seems superfluous and æsthetically out of keeping with the building. At all events, not

only its style but its brilliant coloured light is likely to clash with the necessarily weaker pigments of the paintings below them.



8. *St. Columba landing  
at Iona. A.D. 563.*

With a sanguinary war and the Death of King Diarmid on his conscience, all for the sake of a Psalter copy, Columba, the Saint, fled from Ireland to Iona, there to become "The Apostle of the Highlands," the founder of the Scottish National Church, and owing to his reputation for skilful steering, the patron saint of the boatmen of Scotland.

Brangwyn's panel is one of the two smaller square pictures which complete the decoration on each wall. The subject needs no explanation. One of the most perfect in composition—note the happy use he has made of the pole both symbolically and architecturally—the painting is distinguished by its excellent colour scheme, blue grey, with a pearly iridescent background and the red hair of the boatman in the foreground as a note of contrast.

The reproduction does not do the colour-key, which is much lighter in tonality, justice, but at least it gives an idea not only of the dignity of the composition but also of the artist's dexterity in the handling of "textures" and outlines.

9. *St. Patrick in the Forest.* A.D. 450.

The worst of historical exactness in reference to art is the hindrance it opposes to imagination.

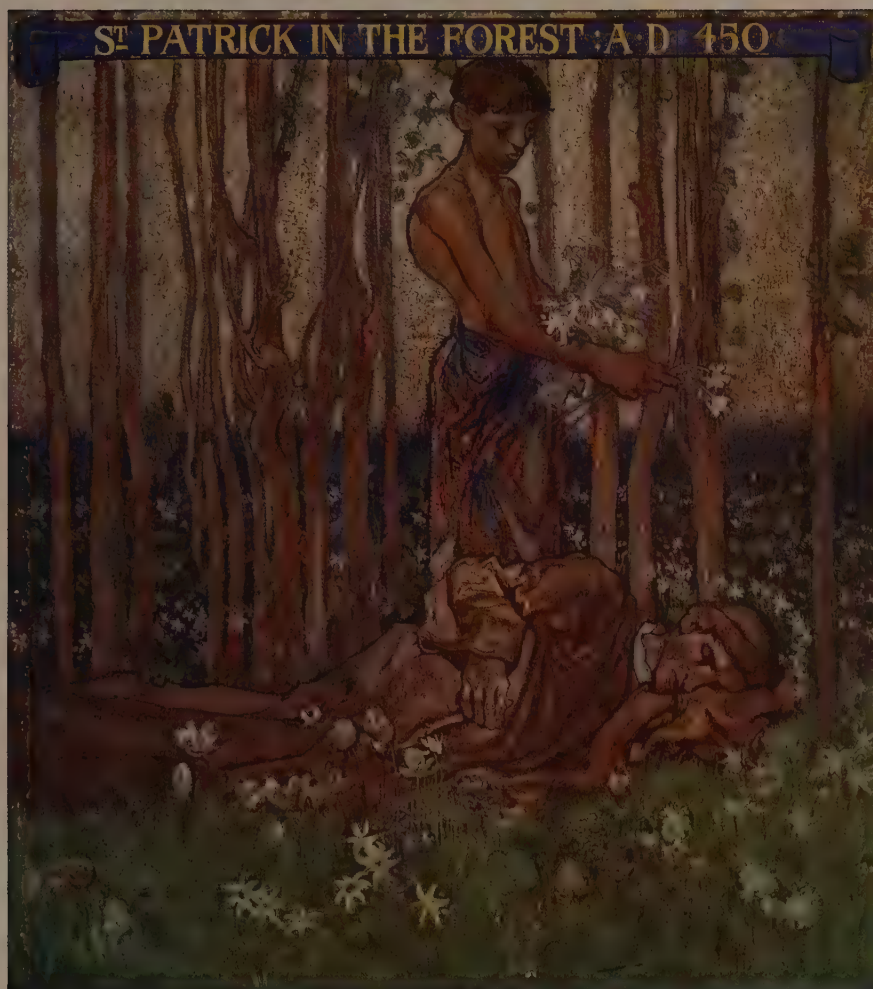
Here is one of Brangwyn's most delightful panels—if we except the unaccountably misshapen shoulder-blade of the standing youth—yet owing to the date given in the inscription, the writer finds himself constrained to waste time on a point that, though possibly of interest to the historian, has but little if indeed any relevance to the Art of decoration.

What is the precise significance of this episode? After delving in various books of reference, I am forced to give it up. St. Patrick, introduced here symbolically to indicate the conversion of Ireland, as St. Columba is for Scotland and St. Aidan for England, was an inveterate dreamer, and at first I imagined that the subject was intended to represent the following episode.

After St. Patrick's captivity in Ireland and escape from there through Gaul to Levius on the South Coast of France, he returned thence to his native Britain. It was there that he heard "the voice of the Irish" calling him. "In a vision of the night, it seemed to him that he saw a man standing by his side." But instead of flowers, the legend says he held "a bundle of letters." "And as I read the beginning of it, said the Saint, I fancied I heard the voice of the folk who were near the wood of Fochlad, nigh to the Western Sea, and this was the cry: 'We pray thee, holy youth, to come and again walk among us as before.' I was pierced to the heart and could read no more; and thereupon I awoke."\* In later days the call was said to have come from the children of Fochlad—symbolised perhaps by the youth in Brangwyn's picture. This dream must have happened somewhere about 415, according to the authority quoted below, but what he dreamt, or why he slept in a forest in 450, when he had been a Bishop for eighteen years, I have not yet discovered, nor feel called upon to investigate, because it really does not matter.

\* J. B. Bury, M.A. "The Life of St. Patrick." Macmillan, 1905.





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Tender purply blue in its colour-scheme, almost Mæterlinckish in its dreamlike quality, this smaller square panel is worthy of its companion on the wall opposite. The reproduction gives a rather false idea of its delicate tonality, but it brings out, though much exaggerated, a peculiarity that makes Brangwyn's technique so much more interesting than that of other mural decorators. I have drawn attention to it in the St. Columba as "texture," and mean by it that extraordinary method of brushing and putting on colour in more or less square dabs, almost akin to the square "pointillism" amongst the Neo-Impressionist painters, but employed by Brangwyn to produce a tapestry like effect.

10. *St. Alban, Martyr.* "Lord with all my heart I offer my Soul to Thee."

Alban, a young Saxon noble, trying to hide a Christian priest, Amphiphalus by name, from his persecutors, drew upon himself the wrath of the Romans, the greater because Alban had attempted to deceive the magistrate



by changing clothes with his friend, who had converted him to Christianity. The young Saxon was thereupon commanded to reveal the priest's hiding place and to sacrifice to the gods on pain of being put to death. But not only did he refuse to betray his friend, confessing himself openly a Christian, he accused his persecutors of sacrificing not to gods but to devils. Thereupon he was condemned first to be scourged and then beheaded outside the City of Verulam. As Alban was greatly beloved in his city the sentence caused much excitement, and the crowds that flocked to see him die were so great that the bridge across the river became blocked, so that the soldiers with their prisoner could not pass. Thereupon Alban knelt down and prayed that a passage might be provided—the waters at once parted so that all could pass dryshod. How this miracle affected his first executioner, and how even the second executioner was only persuaded to do his duty by another miracle does not here concern us, as Brangwyn's panel only shows us the preliminary scourging of England's first martyr, and the crowds that came to witness it.

Again in colour and composition, this picture is eminently successful, the types of the watching Romans are dignified, though the soldiers and executioners verge on caricature in their stupid brutality. What, however, is very remarkable is the manner in which the Artist has managed to represent violent action without depriving the composition of the static quality which is one of the principal elements of mural decoration and never absent from Brangwyn's compositions.

II. *St. Augustine at Ebbsfleet. " Turn, O Lord, Thy wrath from this people."*

The Saint Augustine of this picture is, of course, the Benedictine Prior of St. Andrew in Rome, who afterwards became the first Bishop of Canterbury, and not to be confused with the Bishop of Hippo.

This panel embodies three separate episodes, *viz.* : The landing at Ebbsfleet and the meeting of the Saint with King Ethelbert represented in the picture, whilst the title is a fragment of the words sung by the grateful monks as they wended their way across the marshes of Thanet to take possession of the home the King had granted them at Canterbury.

We have no space here to give a detailed account of the three events, and must content ourselves with a few notes. The legend says that St.



Gregory, having noticed the fair-haired English slaves in the Roman market, exclaimed: "non Angli sed Angeli—not Angles but Angels are they; rightly is their land named Deira for de ira—anglice—from the ire of the lord shall they be rescued and fitly is their King named Aella—for Alleluia shall be sung in his land"—nor repented of his puns. At all events the sight of these Angles made him anxious to convert them to Christianity, and being unable to undertake this task himself, the Prior of St. Andrews was appointed to it. St. Augustine eventually landed at Ebbsfleet and to his surprise he found, "Instead of savages of uncouth manners and barbarous speech, a courteous ruler whose noble wife had already predisposed him to listen to the truth, surrounded by Thanes of stately bearing, ready to welcome the strangers kindly. . . ."\*

The actual meeting between the King and the Missionary, who was accompanied by forty Benedictine Monks, bearing a silver Cross and a picture of the Redeemer, took place a few days after the landing, and in the

\* Mrs. Arthur Bell. "Lives and Legends of the English Bishops and Kings." George Bell & Sons, 1904.



open air, because the cautious King was afraid that the Saint might cast a spell on him if he received him under a roof.

St. Augustine preached a sermon of which nothing is known except that it was very long—and successful : for the King granted them permission to remain in his Country and to convert as many as he could, without using compulsion.

Relieved of all their fears, the Missionaries formed themselves in procession and went towards Canterbury singing : “ Turn from this city, O Lord, Thine anger and wrath, and turn it from Thy holy house, for we have sinned,” bursting out every now and then into a sort of glad Alleluia ! ”\* so that St. Gregory’s prophecy might be fulfilled.

In his pictorial poem, Brangwyn represents the “ Courteous Ruler ” and the “ Thanos of stately bearing ” convincingly, and the Saint with noble dignity, the whole being of greater spiritual beauty, as distinct from æsthetic accomplishment, than most of the others.

The composition is simple and satisfactory, the colour scheme light yellow and red, relieved by the blue greys of the sky and the foam-capped waves of the English sea.

12. *St. Aidan, Bishop of Northumbria. A.D. 635. Training Boys at Lindisfarne.*

St. Aidan, a Columbian monk of Iona, there won a reputation for his missionary devotion and his skill in the education of the young. He consequently drew the attention of King Oswald, who had been educated at Iona, upon himself, and at the King’s request but against his own wish, went to Northumbria, was consecrated Bishop and made the King’s chief Adviser. Instead of remaining at Court, however, the Bishop retired to Lindisfarne, since called Holy Island, off the coast of Northumberland, so that he might the better prepare himself for his great task. There eventually he drew around himself a large community of monks and pupils. His activities both as teacher and preacher were so successful that he has been called “ The True Apostle of England.”

Pleasing enough in “ pattern ” and colour, considered as part of the whole scheme of decoration, Brangwyn’s conception here does not really convince ; one feels that the Artist was not as much interested in this

\* Mrs. Arthur Bell. Loc. cit.





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subject as in most of the others. Every mural decorator is exposed to the temptation of using figures and forms only to make space interesting, which Brangwyn has here done, instead of striking the fine balance between the demands of subject and those of space.

13. *St. Wilfrid, Bishop of Selsey, teaching the South Saxons.* A.D. 681.

St. Wilfrid, a pupil at Lindisfarne, became Bishop of York and later Bishop of Selsey. Apart from his missionary activities, his life seems mainly remarkable on account of his constant and unfortunate quarrels with his civil and clerical superiors, and the repeated appeals to the Pope which this made necessary. On one of these journeys to Rome he fell into the hands of the South Saxons, having suffered shipwreck on the Sussex Coast. He and his companions were made prisoners and treated as slaves. They escaped after some time with difficulty. Many years later, disgraced, discredited and deprived of his dignities, he left Northumbria,



joined a little, hitherto unsuccessful, community of Celtic Christians in Sussex, and began life as a missionary once again. A three years' famine had devastated the country, whose inhabitants were therefore in sore straits. St. Wilfrid's first care was, very wisely, to look after the bodily needs of his "children," and Bede tells us that he taught them to fish—presumably some improvement on the native method, for it is not to be supposed that heathens though the South Saxons were, they can have been quite ignorant of this art. At all events so great a harvest did they reap from the sea that all want was at an end. The natives, who, many years ago, had ill-treated him, now gratefully allowed themselves to be converted.

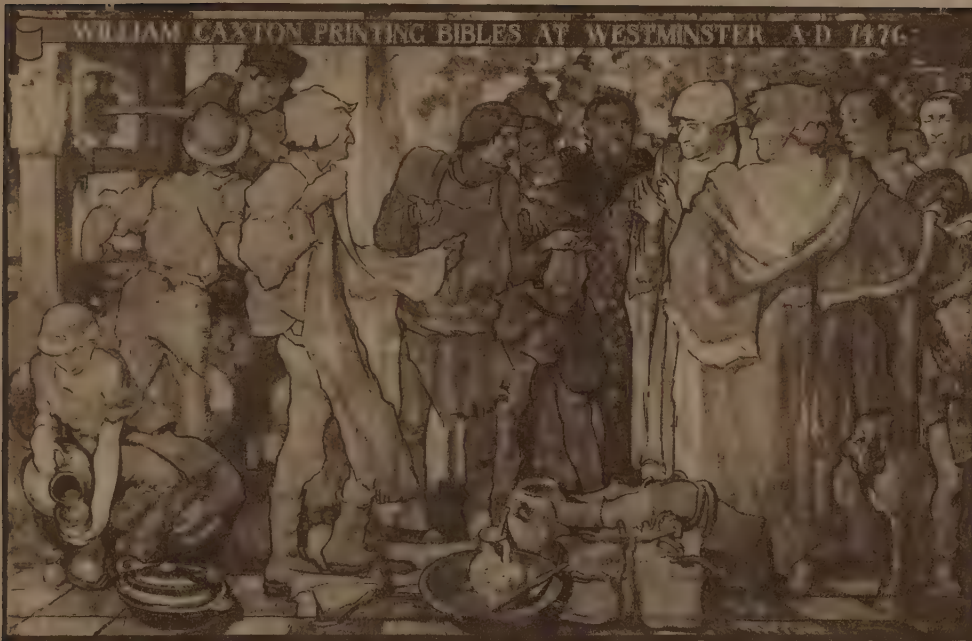
This forms the kernel of Brangwyn's decoration.

The composition is truly splendid, the eye travels with pleasure from the left over the shoulders of the stooping figure, down over the cunningly emphasized outline of his nether garments and then in one bold sweep along the lines of the net and the straining figures up to the right and back to the static perpendicular dignity of the standing figures. The Artist here shines as a master of composition. The brilliant colour notes, the green loin cloth of the man on the left, a red note in the cap of a man on the same side and the beautiful yellows in the garments of the man on the right lending interest to the whole.

The motive of the naked figures hauling the net so pleased the artist that he utilised almost the same group in one of his "Panama" Panels. In these figures, both in drawing and flesh painting, we see Brangwyn's qualities at their best.

#### 14. *William Caxton printing Bibles at Westminster.* A.D. 1476.

Any average school boy reading this inscription at the head of Brangwyn's picture, with the instinctive respect the school boy has for the erudition of his masters, would take it for granted that William Caxton did the thing he is there credited with, and would, I make no doubt, infer that the Bibles were English Bibles, and that William Caxton's principal merit was the propagation of Religion in general and of the Reformed Faith in particular. And one can imagine his surprise when he hears that the Bibles that were printed before 1535 (when Miles Coverdale printed the first complete English version), were not English, and that in any case William



Caxton did not print Bibles in any language. Where is the point, then? The misleading inscription does not tell him that Caxton was one of the makers of the language he speaks, it does not even tell him that his merit was the establishment of the Printing press in his country, it tells him nothing of importance, and the rest is incorrect or immaterial.

Fortunately we have in Brangwyn an Artist who knows his job, so that his pictures can not only be enjoyed as decorations, but even read with better profit than their "legend."

The press is visible on the left of the picture and shows the up and down movement of the old hand presses. A printer is displaying a newly printed sheet to interested spectators, whilst the foreground is filled with Folios, bundles of paper, jars and dishes for colour and oil. The dog on the right is just such a little touch of fancy that will appeal to the boys.

The panel strikes one as richer or rather more sumptuous than the rest, with which it nevertheless harmonises in tonality.

15. *John Eliot giving Bibles to the Mohicans.* A.D. 1660.

This panel is no doubt meant to symbolise the spread of Christianity to the New World. John Eliot's ambition was to turn the nomadic tribes of Red Indians into one great Christian organisation. The date, as Mr. Crossley Davies points out, is incorrect, "it was not until 1661 that he gave the Indians the New Testament in their own language, and not until 1663 that his Old Testament was finished." Even a correctness in minor matters, however, would not rectify the erroneous impression the subject leaves on the mind of the schoolboy. The civilisation of America is purely European, has very little to do with the distribution of the Bible, which did not in any case save the Mohicans from extinction.

Thanks to Brangwyn's art, however, the boys may at least enjoy the dramatic contrast between the Puritan in his sombre garments and the stately Red Indians in the full glory of their "War-paint." A fine and satisfactory composition, in which the details of textiles, flowers, birds, wings, sea and sky are deftly woven into a beautiful pattern, this picture adds another scene to the *orbis pictus* here represented, and which takes the mind from Jerusalem, Rome, Milan, to Iona, Ireland, England and America.

16. *Let the people praise Thee, O God : let all the people praise Thee :*

The words of the psalmist have given Brangwyn an opportunity to reveal—albeit unconsciously—his innermost. He shows us here the humanity he loves. It is a humanity without graces, without polish, crooked and crippled, twisted and gnarled, but struggling towards the light with the blind hope and the courageous will of the seed even that which has "fallen among thorns," or "on stony places." A strange decoration this; a picture that, regarded as a representation of actuality, carries as a whole, little conviction, but examined detail upon detail, figure by figure, from the low red roofs of East End houses at the back to the vegetable refuse





PANEL IN THE CHAPEL OF CHRIST'S HOSPITAL







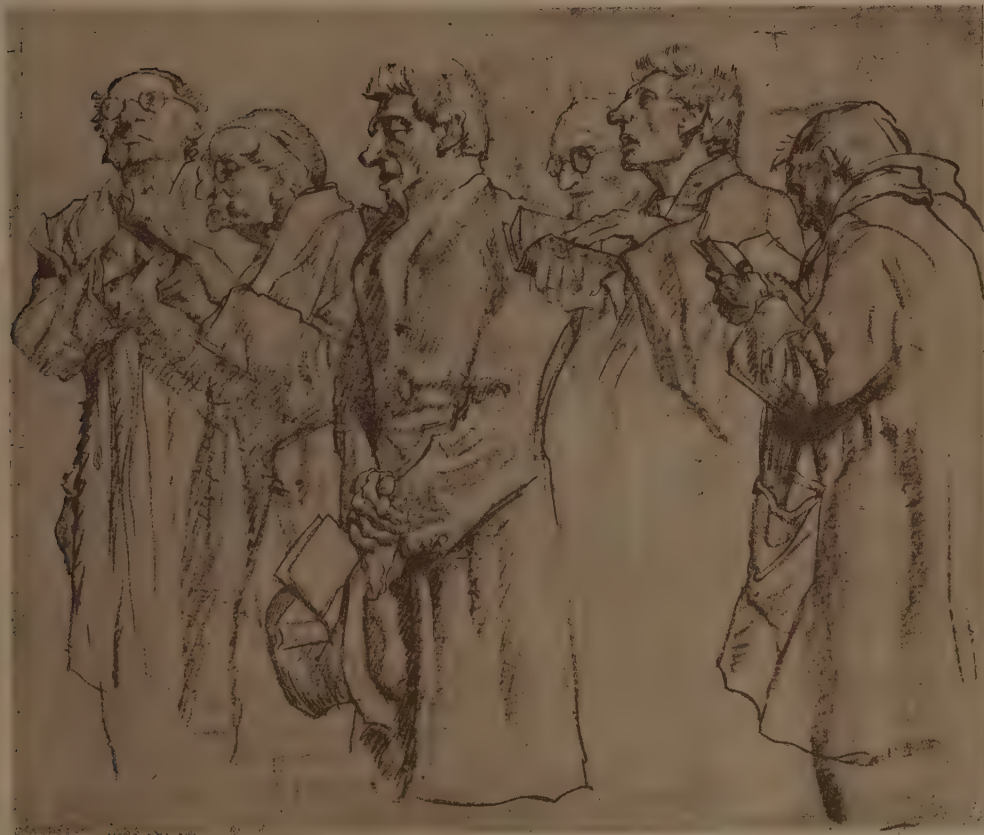


LET THE PEOPLE PRAISE THEE O GOD: LET ALL THE PEOPLE PRAISE THEE

PANEL IN THE CHAPEL OF CHRIST'S HOSPITAL.

in front, from the white-haired priest and the red-haired mother, to the inimitable " gutter-snipes " in the foreground, throbs with the vitality of truth, and testifies to the artist's acute grasp of character.

From the decorative point of view it is much soberer and less luscious in colour than the rest.





## XVIII. THE ST. AIDAN'S CHURCH MOSAICS AT LEEDS.

(RUST'S VITREOUS MOSAIC)



**L**ESS than thirty-five years ago there was in Leeds no St. Aidan's Parish, no St. Aidan's Church—to-day there is not only a flourishing parish, but thanks to the enthusiasm and foresight of a former Vicar of Leeds, Dr. Jayne, to wit, one of the finest churches—or, to be precise, church interiors in England. I say *interiors* not because the exterior is devoid of grace, but its situation, the lack of the planned but not yet erected campanile, make it inconspicuous, and in any case the smoke-laden atmosphere, which the city shares with all our industrial towns, smothers all grace in grime.









FIRST SKETCH FOR THE MOSAIC DECORATION  
OF THE APSE OF ST. AIDAN'S, LEEDS.





As proposed by Dr. Jayne, St. Aidan's was built in the style of a basilica because, as the Rev. R. M. Nicholls\* tells us "the plain undecorated exterior of this type of church harbours the dirt much less than the ornate carved niches and mouldings of Gothic architecture." Dirt, however, is dirt, and the red brick is only less disfigured by it than a grey stone would be.

The building was completed in 1894, is 188 feet long in its interior, by 67 feet wide across nave and aisles and 80 feet across the organ chamber, nave and side chapel. This "basilica" has an apse at each end, the western being used as a baptistry, whilst the eastern apse contains, of course, the High Altar. Eleven semicircular arches, supported by round columns, with carved capitals, each differing in design from its neighbour, separate the nave from the aisles. Daylight reaches the church through the windows in the western apse, through the arches from the aisle walls and from a row of larger lights in the clerestory. The choir, approached by seven steps from the nave, is raised five feet six inches above the floor and surrounded by a parapet wall nine feet high. A lofty arch, supported by two well proportioned columns, twenty-four feet six inches high, separates the Sanctuary from



\* "St. Aidan's Church, Bishop Woodford Memorial," Leeds. A description, etc., compiled by the Rev. R. M. Nicholls, M.A., Leeds. Richard Jackson, 1911.

the Choir, the top of the arch being some forty-two feet above the floor. The Altar is approached by a central flight of fifteen steps. On the apse wall, about ten feet from the floor, and beneath a gilded dome, is Brangwyn's decoration in mosaic, the parapet wall being similarly decorated.

Our purpose here is not to describe the details of the Church but to give, as far as that is possible, a general description of the "æsthetic unit" of which Brangwyn's work forms part.

Standing at the western end of the nave, one notices that the general tone of the church is a light bluish grey, and as the eye travels, sub-consciously elated by the really beautiful proportions of the architecture, down the nave; it observes at the eastern end, as the subordinated æsthetic unit and at the same time the centre of visual attraction, the decorated parapet wall, the apse arch, and the Sanctuary behind it. From the semicircular recess of the apse the Mosaic with its gilt "hood" sparkles mysteriously. Suddenly a warm light floods the semicircular wall and bathes the whole Sanctuary in a jewelled and golden glory. This may sound "novelette-ish," but for once it describes the effect of the concealed electric lighting accurately: it *is* golden and it *is* glorious, and for all its anachronism, just the right foil





ST. AIDAN'S, LEEDS



for the religious mystery of the Altar service. The grey of the rest of the building becomes by contrast more blue, the parapet walls standing out in a lighter, paler key, whilst the colour notes in the golden light of the apse sparkle here and there red, crimson, violet and blue.

We approach the Choir and distinguish on the parapet wall five panels on each side of the steps, containing a procession of the "heavy laden," who appear to be wending their way slowly up the choir steps. These figures are practically in monochrome, white with greenish and brownish tints, against a dark blue night sky powdered with stars.

We follow them up the steps and stand reverentially not only before the Altar but before Brangwyn's wonderful mosaic, which commencing above a buff coloured dado of vitreous tiles, ten feet high, reaches to the gilded dome.



We need not here dwell on the story of St. Aidan, which was touched upon in the description of the Blue Coat School decoration. The subject matter of this mosaic in Leeds is the landing of the Saint in Northumbria, his life there and his death. The three or four divisions of the subject are all rendered in one pictorial design, but the composition is so cunningly devised that the story unfolds itself without break, or the sense of incongruity, that so often mars one's enjoyment of such compound pictures.

This is due to the continuity of the picture plane, which, with the exception of the "Landing," develops along the foreground in such a manner that the, larger than life-size, figures are all more or less on the same level, thus forming a continuous light frieze of buff,





PORTION OF THE MOSAIC DECORATION  
OF THE APSE OF ST. AIDAN'S, LEEDS.

ornamented here and there by strong colour notes of red, heliotrope, blues and orange; a deep note of blue sky paling towards the horizon, but darkening into a strip of russet red, before it meets the blue of the sea and the green of the landscape background. Tall vertical tree trunks, studded where they meet the blue with russet foliage, give architectural stability to the whole decoration, which is of rare static dignity and grandeur.

Brangwyn has never done anything better; for this picture—if a mosaic may be called a picture—though full of Brangwyn's idiosyncracies, has none of his exaggerations. The treatment of the draperies lends a peculiar dignity to the composition, which is further enhanced by the comparatively sparing use made of the more positive colour accents. But if one admires the composition and colour orchestration æsthetically, one must not disregard the subject matter, which Brangwyn has rendered with unwonted care. There are figures in it, such as the kneeling child on the extreme right and the mourning figure, to the figure of St. Aidan preaching in the centre, and the gorgeously clad group on the left, where St. Aidan is seen amongst his new "flock," which impress themselves indelibly on the mind. Further, such, from the subject point of view, trifling incidents as the flowers and the geese in the foreground are done with a "loving kindness" that shows Brangwyn's instinctive sympathy with every form of life. The whole scene is a miracle of pictorial invention, which one can study in detail with untiring interest.

Brangwyn is often criticised, and sometimes not unfairly, because in his impetuous and impatient energy he, like the law "*non curat de minimis*," but here in the decorations of St. Aidan's he has proved his mettle. I know of no other master, living or dead, who has done anything as good.

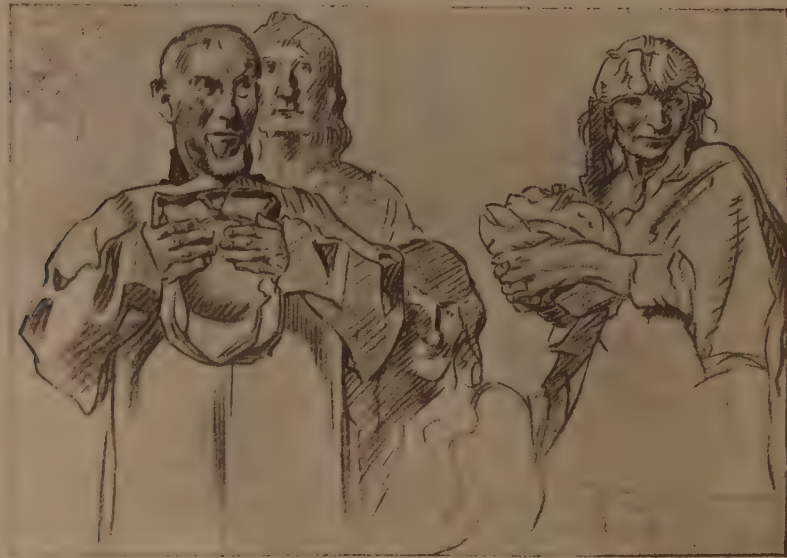
True, he was fortunate not only in the excellence of the architecture—the church was designed by the late R. J. Johnson, F.S.A., of the firm of Johnson & Crawford-Hick, Newcastle-on-Tyne—but also in the execution of the mosaic. This work was done for Mr. J. B. Rust by girls under the supervision of Mr. Sylvester Sparrow, who produced equally excellent results in the Brangwyn Windows of Bucklebury Church. But giving credit to all to whom credit is due, amongst them to Mr. Robert Hawthorn Kitson, who originally commissioned the artist, there remains the outstanding fact that Brangwyn conceived his decoration as part of the larger



æsthetic unit, so that his parapet wall and the decorated apse form the central "jewel" of a beautiful architectural composition. The consequence is that St. Aidan's is now one of the most beautiful modern churches, certainly in England. And one further observation should be made : both artist and decorator have achieved their purpose without archaistic devices. Brangwyn in particular has known how to treat his subject without having recourse to the insincere archaistic formulæ which most church-decorators have to fall back upon.

St. Aidan's Church should be studied by all whose business it is to encourage mural decoration. The lesson it teaches is that one can be *modern* and yet keep to the principles of tradition. It is only to be hoped that the beautiful and effective simplicity of this church interior will not in future be spoilt by pious, well meant, but superfluous further "decorations."

As it now stands it is as beautiful as it well could be.





## XIX. "CANADA'S WAR RECORD"

THE PANEL IN THE NEW PARLIAMENT BUILDING, WINNIPEG

(FLAT OIL ON ABSORBENT CANVAS PREPARED BY THE ARTIST)

THE new cities on the American Continent are vieing with each other in the erection of stately public edifices. The New Parliament Building at Winnipeg is no exception to this rule ; it is, however, an exception to the rule which imposes upon a skeleton of modern constructive engineering a skin of traditionalism. This inner structural genuineness seems to manifest itself—though I judge only from photographs—to the eye to which it appears, within its classic order, the more beautiful.

For the Hall of this building, Brangwyn was commissioned to paint a lunette which fills the upper portion of the arch, approximately thirty-six feet



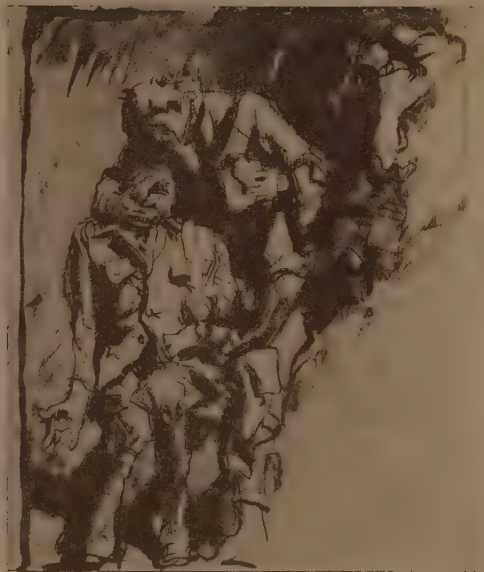
THE NEW PARLIAMENT BUILDING, WINNIPEG



in height; the canvas being about fifteen feet high, twenty-two feet long and placed about twenty-two feet from the floor. The colour of the interior architecture is a warm stone grey, and the prevailing tone of the painting is, for this reason, a correspondingly cool blue grey and warm gold, with a few strong accents of positive colours such as red, orange, and green.

In the choice of his subject, the artist was, unfortunately, not free, or he would certainly not have chosen a "War Record" as a theme for a decoration. On the other hand it is fortunate that the Canadians had the inspiration of commissioning an artist of Brangwyn's calibre, else they might have possibly, nay probably, been outraged with one of those sentimental, in fact blasphemous allegories which make no distinction between the passion of the Holy Rood and the action of the unholy rifle.

Brangwyn has succeeded in making his Allegory of War a veritable human document. The background, both actually and figuratively, is formed by a ruined church and a bewildered image of the Madonna. In the middle distance, and athwart it is the huge barrel of a modern gun, under which fresh human "gun-fodder" is seen passing on to the trenches. The foreground is a homage to the common humanity of the common soldier. We see him in the centre giving succour to his wounded fellows; we see him eating, and trench-digging, and resting; we see him trying to forget the horrors of war to the strains of a concertina. We see the saplings broken, and the flowers of the earth pitying the folly of their human brothers. Æsthetically, the final composition is eminently successful. In its preliminary stage the gun was mounted higher up in the canvas and the barrel was horizontal, with the result that the mechanistic rather than the human aspect of war was recorded—the gun predominated in





subject, and the horizontal in composition. In its final form the verticals of the tree trunks knit the panel closely to the architecture, and give that static quality which is architecturally necessary to a theme that demands a sense of crowded movement, in order to make it convincing.

What this "Canadian War Record" picture demonstrates, is, or at least ought to be, extremely valuable to the younger generation of artists who aspire to become decorators. This decoration is neither treated as an illustration, nor as a symbolic allegory; its realism is not that of the camera, its idealism is not that of the Renaissance or the Greeks. Its technique—an immensely complicated system of colouring and brush work—is not that of the fresco, nor is it, on the other hand, merely a magnified oil technique. It is, from the subject point of view, a dramatic poem: but the drama is

one of lines and masses of pigments, and not merely of literary allusion. From the æsthetic or purely decorative point of view it is flat, in the sense that it belongs to the wall, but not through the simple device of painting in flat planes, but through a very skilful handling of colour perspective and brushing which makes the numberless dabs of the brush swim, at its distance from the eye into a single, tapestry-like surface.

In thus giving Brangwyn the credit due to him, we must not omit all reference to the architect who provided him with an ideally proportioned space to decorate.







ONE OF THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS  
INTENDED FOR A CHURCH IN FRANCE.

## XX. THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS: PRETORIA AND ARRAS

THE problems confronting a contemporary artist in connection with the decoration of churches are by no means as simple as one might—from most modern “solutions”—be inclined to deduce.

The principal difficulty is fundamental, that is to say, it is part of the very foundations, not of the Christian faith, but of the Christian Church.

Decoration means in effect and implicitly an elation of the mind, an elation which may vary from simple pleasure to passionate ecstasy. On the other hand, many elements which have become associated with Church-decoration are neither pleasureable nor “decorative” in intention, but purely didactic and informative; the æsthetic element in such cases may have entered into the actual making of each symbol. One primitive Christian with artistic talent might, for example, carve his “IXΘΥΣ” with a better style than another not so gifted, but that does not make the “Fish” or any other religious symbol necessarily decorative in purpose. The composition of the far-famed mosaics in Monreale clearly shows that they were not prompted by any desire to decorate the *architecture* with which they interfere as planlessly as posters do with the architecture of to-day.

Next it must be remembered that the Christian Religion has, like most others, a strong bias towards the fearful and the awe-inspiring, no less real because it is superficially nowadays ignored. The “fear of God” is with many, from the times of the first Judæo-Christians down to the latest Salvation Army recruit, a very real and physical, and by no means only a spiritual thing. Indeed the mind that postulates a Heaven, must of necessity postulate a Hell, or see its equivalent in this “Vale of Tears.”

Church decoration is then by its very nature not entirely elative, but partly and necessarily depressing in effect.

There are, however, other factors which militate against a *living* form of Church-decoration, resulting from the very age of the Church as an institution, from the archaicisms of her language and ritual, or, more





ONE OF THE "STATIONS OF THE CROSS"  
INTENDED FOR FRANCE

correctly expressed, from the fossilising of their associative ideas, which tends to suffocate the practical living Truth embedded rather than embodied in the Faith. For the many, therefore, dogmatic religion is a thing apart from life instead of its very core and essence. Only the sensitive, imaginative and poetic mind, which is rare, can appreciate its beauty, whilst



the majority, if affected at all, find in the Church at best an escape from life, and in its dogma an anæsthetic.

The modern artist, anxious to serve the living truth, but with examples of a dead past before his eyes, is tempted to imitate its solemn splendour, erstwhile introduced into the Church with the avowed purpose of impressing the mind of uncultured and semi-civilised barbarians.

But what "splendour" is there left that is not exploited to-day in the interests of commerce, for example by regal Inn-and Shop-keepers?

The average Church-decorator, taking the line of least resistance, therefore contents himself with the repetition of ancient forms, the perpetuation of a fossilised style, usually the Gothic, and produces what generations of indolent Churchgoers expect of him, *viz.*, a scheme of

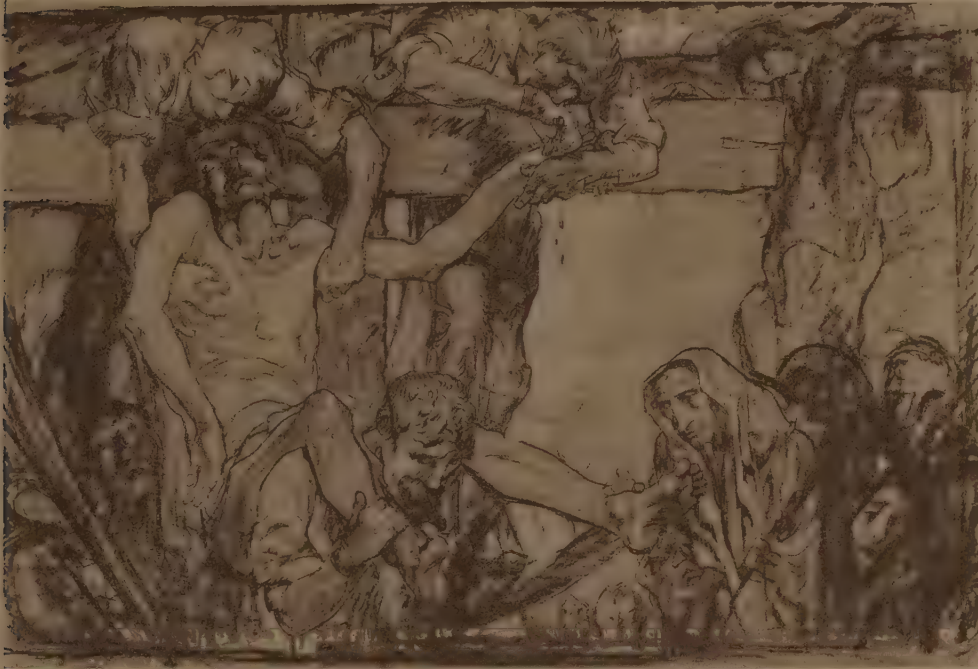


decoration which has no direct bearing on their scheme of living. Under such conditions the architect and decorator have no problems of particular difficulty to face, since all they need do is to refer to their predecessors and adopt or adapt what has been done before with more or less ability.

The case is very different with the artists who wish to express in their work their religious and æsthetic convictions: they will probably feel,



like Brangwyn, that, strictly speaking, any form of pictorial or representational art is out of place in a *modern* Church. Brangwyn, at all events, would prefer decorations of an abstract, purely symbolic and ornamental kind, calculated to compose the mind and not to distract it, a danger the more real, the more interesting and attractive the pictorial representation is. Such asceticism, such a renunciation of all pictorial appeal on the part of



the artist would neither commend itself to the donors, nor probably to the worshippers whose sense of "expectation" has been reared and fed by centuries of different custom.

The problem then becomes one of making pictures conform to the spirit of their subject matter and their architectural environment.

Of all the subjects connected with Church decoration, and with the Life of Christ in particular, the fourteen "Stations of the Cross" are the



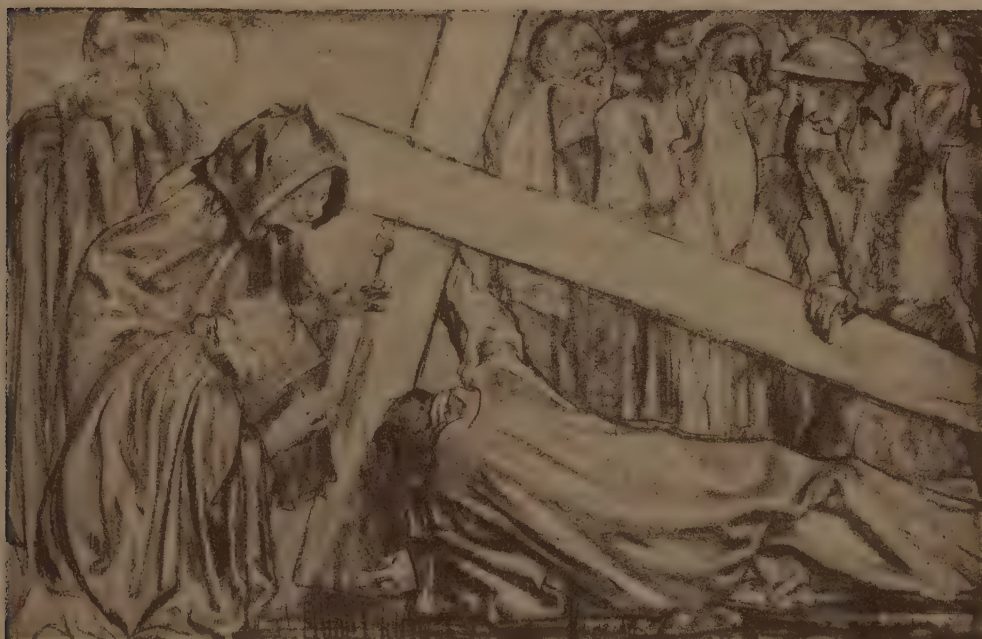
least suitable for purely decorative, symbolic, or even picturesque treatment. They represent the story of the "Tragedy of Christ" in the traditional detailed and exact manner, and constrain the artist to a simple and direct narration. Their purpose, furthermore, is not to delight, nor even to tell a story only: they must *move* the worshipper; they are to make him *feel* the tragedy as if he were an eye-witness.

In this connection Brangwyn has an interesting theory. "Seen under



a blue sky, the procession, moving in warm sunlight and a cloud of dust, would hardly impress the spectator if he himself were in health and a good condition of mind, at all; or it might move him to a superficial and passing sense of pity; but it is more likely that it would simply rouse in him the herd-instinct of the majority and betray him into active hostility. Under a leaden sky, in the rain and a cold wind blowing, the same spectator's mind might turn much more actively to sympathy, which would be increased if he himself were not feeling perfectly hale and well."

Certain it is that we habitually project ourselves into everything we see, and so only sympathise where we can picture *ourselves* as suffering. Under such conditions the treatment of a subject will greatly depend on the quality of emotions it is intended to evoke. If Brangwyn's theory is sound, and I think it is, then the strict adherence to traditional elements, or on the contrary, the strict adherence to "nature" and naturalistic illusion would not produce the effect which is alone in this connection desirable.



Attracted by the ethico-religious and the æsthetic difficulties of the problem, Brangwyn welcomed an opportunity to solve it which presented itself when Father Bryan, the priest of the Leper Mission in Pretoria, begged him to paint one of the Stations for the Lepers' Church. In his enthusiasm, the Artist promised to paint not only one but the whole fourteen stations. He wanted to make them his *magnum opus*, more especially because he admired the spirit of the priest who, armed only with the faith that moves

mountains, but without money or material, obtained both by an appeal to potential donors of money or kind in different parts of the world. The response was so generous that Father Bryan's Church stands to-day a monument to the pastor's zeal and a consolation, one hopes, to his unfortunate flock.

So far as the Artist is concerned, however, these Stations have for reasons which have already been given in Brangwyn's own words in an earlier part of the book, not turned out the success he hoped to make them. Their design was hurried, and the execution was left to the less skilled hand of an assistant.

Much more successful, another set of "Stations," destined for a Church in the devastated regions of France, probably Arras, promises to be.

In these the Artist is practically hampered by the fact that the destination is not definitely fixed, and therefore the size, proportion and height from the eye of spectator not predetermined. Every true artist works better within given limitations. These qualifications, however, reflect on Brangwyn's "Stations" only in the sense of practical application; from the purely æsthetic point of view the commission has given rise to a number of drawings and studies of composition, and paintings, which are not only in themselves interesting, but amongst the best things the Artist has done. He has tried all manner of sizes and proportions, and changed his compositions accordingly, and as a matter of fact is still continuing these experiments.

Now he will take an oblong space and design a processional composition of half length figures, anon, still retaining the horizontally elongated form he will endeavour to give a greater dramatic force by introduction of full length proportions. Now he will compress the space into a square and rely almost entirely on the facial expression; anon he will so change the arrangement that the large heads group themselves around the head of the principal person, demanding in execution a Rembrandtesque concentration of light. Now he tries a pale and high, anon a rich and deep key of colour. He seems inexhaustible in pictorial invention.

The artist who has shaken off the fetters of a false tradition is free, but the endless possibilities of his freedom thrust upon him a greater sense of personal responsibility and *voluntary* restraint, than which nothing is more difficult to achieve in any form of art.



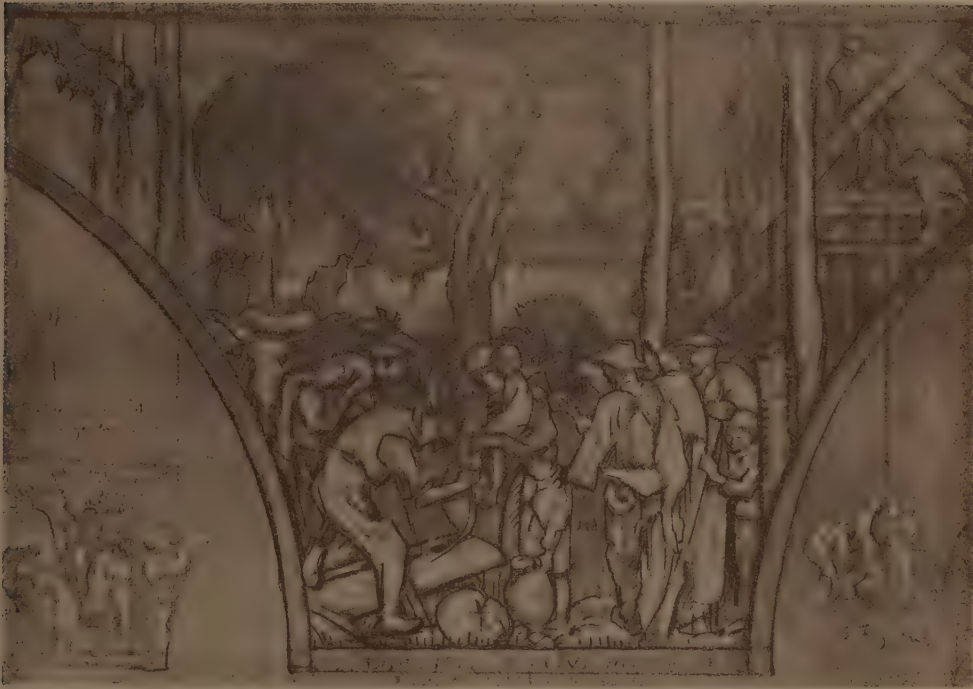




"THE PIONEERS," DECORATION  
IN THE MISSOURI STATE CAPITAL.

## XXI. THE DECORATIONS OF THE MISSOURI STATE CAPITOL

(FLAT OIL ON CANVAS PREPARED BY THE ARTIST)



**J**EFFERSON City, named after the third president of the United States, is the capital of the State of Missouri. As such it possesses, like the rest of the "States," a Capitol; the very name, a legacy of the eighteenth century, reminiscent less of Washington's political than of Winckelmann's architectural ideals.

The old building, burnt down in one day, in February, 1911, was replaced, in 1915, by a magnificent new edifice, which only took two years to construct, against Iowa's nine, Wisconsin's twelve, Minnesota's thirteen, Illinois' twenty-one, and New York's thirty-three years, as stated in the "Report of the State Commission's Board," with the additional information that not one of them "has gotten more for the money expended" (\$200,000), proudly uttered words which I have already quoted and commented upon. I do so again, however, on second thoughts, considering that there is perhaps another side to the source of the citizen's pride, which I may have overlooked because it is less obvious but, if I may say so, rather more commendable. The State representatives may be priding themselves on the economy of their expenditure, not merely as shrewd men of business who have struck a bargain, but because they have realised that there is no *necessary* correspondence between Art and Money values. "Big Muddy," as the Missouri is affectionately termed, will have yet to empty much dirty water into the Mississippi before this truth is generally recognised.

Meantime, Missouri may legitimately rejoice in its Capitol, since as the aforementioned report states: "the originality of the design, the economy and skilful arrangement of space, the modern conveniences *and* the classical and beautiful architecture, are largely the results of the genius and fidelity with which the architects did their work."











"MODERN INDUSTRIAL ST. LOUIS," DECORATION  
IN THE MISSOURI STATE CAPITOL.

But why the "and," which I have italicised? Architecture being the greater, includes, however unbeautiful and unclassic, even "the modern inconveniences." Architecture is fundamentally the purposeful arrangement of spaces—no more, no less.

The building has a dual approach: one from the street level and another, the main entrance, from a terraced drive. Entering the building from the ground level and passing through the vestibule to the lower hall or rotunda, the eye, gazing upwards through the circular aperture in the domed ceiling, sees the great rotunda above, crowned some eighty feet from the eye with the ceiling of the magnificent dome and lantern. The diameter of this dome measures sixty-eight feet inside, and one hundred and four feet to the outer walls. "No American Capitol has a dome which excels or equals it."

Brangwyn has been commissioned to decorate the spaces just mentioned, that is to say, the ceiling of the great rotunda and the spandrails between the arches, as well as the ceiling of the lower dome.

Unfortunately, he was not entrusted with the whole task at one and the same time, the commission for the lower ceiling coming to him as an

afterthought. He therefore considers that a continuity and unity of design and composition which he otherwise would have aimed at became difficult.

The eight sections in the lower hall which are not yet completed will allegorise the industries of the State of Missouri, such as cotton-growing, coal-mining, lead working, etc. The four spandrails, however, are completed; they are each forty-eight and a half feet wide at the tops, sixteen feet at the bottom, and twenty-two and a half feet in height.

With the exception of the first, which has a historical foundation,



the subjects are purely symbolic and represent The Arrival of the Settlers, The Building of the New Home, and Modern Industrial St. Louis, with the first iron bridge in the background opening the way to the West.

A description of these three subjects, which are both dramatic in conception and skilful in composition, is hardly necessary: we may note, however, that the artist has not only kept to the same scale throughout the four compositions, the figures being some twelve feet high, but he has also connected them by the arrangement of his colour scheme. A blue note runs through the upper portions of each spandril, contrasted in the lower portions with an orange accent. The semi-circle formed by the waggon hood in the second subject is a favourite compositional device of his for which there is elsewhere, in art, I believe, no precedent. The first subject: "Laclede parleying with the Indians," though freely and allegorically treated, calls for a note on the history of this State.\*\*

In 1762, the French Governor of Louisiana granted one Maxent, a wealthy merchant of New Orleans, the exclusive right to trade with Missouri Indians for a period of eight years. Maxent took into partnership one Pierre Laclede Ligest, commonly known as Laclede, and their firm, "Maxent, Laclede & Company" became known as the "Louisiana Fur Company."

Laclede left New Orleans on August 3rd, 1763, with a large force of mechanics, trappers and hunters, and a quantity of merchandise suitable for trading with the Indians. Intending to make St. Genevieve his head-quarters until he had discovered a suitable spot for settlement, but not finding



\* Summarised from the account given by Mr. Eugene Violette in his "History of Missouri," New York D. C. Heath, 1918.





"BUILDING THE NEW HOME." DECORATION  
IN THE MISSOURI STATE CAPITOL.









"LACLEDE PARLEYING WITH THE INDIANS."  
DECORATION IN THE MISSOURI STATE CAPITOL.

suitable accommodation for his stores there, he went further up the river to Fort Chartres, where he had not only room for his stores, but also found a home for his family.

Laclede, searching along the west bank of the Mississippi as far North as the Missouri, finally decided on a spot where the channel of the Mississippi ran near the shore, so permitting the boats to be brought close to the landing. The bank, high enough to give protection from floods, was yet not so high as to interfere with the loading and unloading of the cargoes, and back from the bank there was a band of level ground broad enough for the proposed village.

Impressed with the practical advantages and natural beauty of the place, Laclede on returning to Fort Chartres, is said to have remarked to Governor De Noyen and his officers, "I have found a situation where I intend establishing a settlement which in future shall become one of the most beautiful cities of the world."



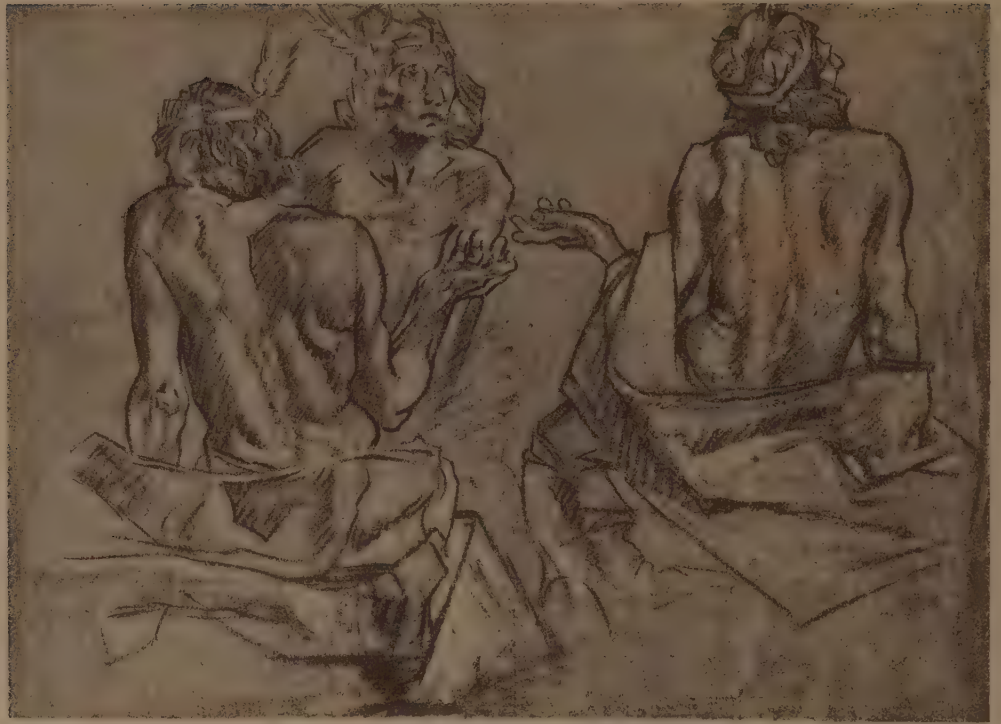
In Brangwyn's painting we are shewn Laclede—the man in the extreme left of the picture with his hand raised, interrogating the Indians.

The Ceiling of the Dome is occupied by a composition of allegorical figures symbolising Art, Commerce, Science and Industry.

As the Artist has recently decorated another domed ceiling, and as the treatment of this architectural feature generally is a matter of considerable interest, I will postpone the discussion of its æsthetic significance for the present.

Suffice it to say that Brangwyn's decorations of the Missouri State





Capitol are amongst the most important he has yet done, thanks to the enterprise of Jefferson City ; but if they are successful it should also be recognised that the problem was one of particular difficulty, seeing that the decorator had to combine in a single æsthetic unit three groups of paintings, each of which receives light of different quality and quantity, and from different angles.



SKETCH FOR THE DECORATION OF THE UPPER DOME IN THE  
STATE CAPITOL OF MISSOURI



SKETCH OF THE PROPOSED ART GALLERY IN TOKYO

## XXII. THE TOKYO "SHEER PLEASURE ARTS PAVILION"

IT is probably true that the Orientals in general, and the Japanese in particular, are making a closer and more purposeful study of Western mentality and its thousand years of piebald achievement than we Occidentals are making of theirs, and so one never meets a yellow man whose eyes do not speak, however wreathed in smiles his countenance, however amiable his tongue, a deep down, silent, but eloquent contempt for our *superiority*. The East is determined to beat us at our own game, as no doubt it will, but our game is not everything, as even we are beginning to find out.

The collection of pictures and other works of Western Art which Mr. Matsukata, the Japanese millionaire shipbuilder and patron of art, is presenting to his nation will therefore be regarded, one feels, not so much with admiration as with curiosity, when once it is opened to the public gaze at Tokyo. The problem was how to add to this curiosity another quality: respect.

Brangwyn, a personal friend of the Nippon Maecenas, became the architect of the building in which the collection of art is to be housed by a fortunate chance rather than deliberate forethought.

One calls this chance fortunate, because, in other circumstances, the task would have been entrusted, one fears, to a professional and orthodox architect. There is here no slight of the profession intended. It is nevertheless true, that an artist among architects is as rare as an architect, that is to say a constructor, among artists, and in Frank Brangwyn Mr. Matsukata happened upon a painter who became acquainted with the principles and the practice of architecture as the son of his father, and whose subsequent career as a decorator kept him in constant touch with its problems.

There is, I think, little doubt that out of a thousand architects, nine hundred would have tackled the problem with the desire of producing a building loaded with "architectural features" of the classic or renaissance



order ; fifty would have attempted to combine Japanese with the Renaissance or the Gothic with the Japanese styles ; forty would have plumped for a Japanese building ; nine, especially if they had been chosen from Germany, would have experimented with some quite " new ideas in architecture," and very interesting they might have turned out to be. Brangwyn, however, is the only one, one imagines, who would have thought of approaching the problem from an utterly simple and yet more subtle point of view.

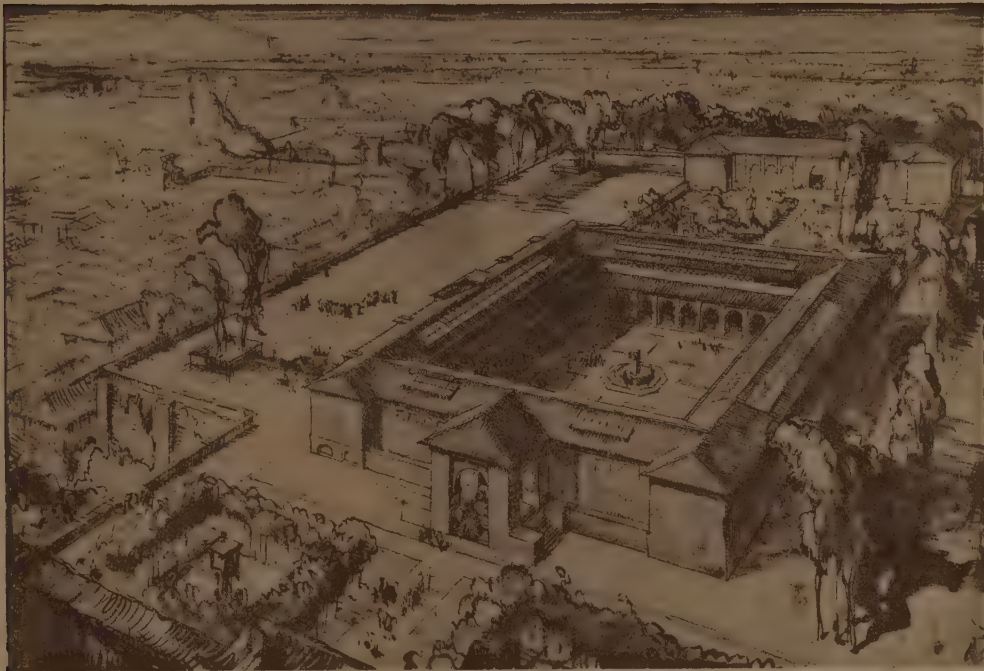
The origin of Mr. Matsukata's present scheme was this gentleman's desire to have a place where these collected treasures might be safely stored. It began as a mere safe-deposit, a simple receptacle for valuable objects of art. Out of this grew the idea of a public picture gallery, and when the Marquis Matsukata, the collector's father, declared himself willing to present for this purpose a splendid raised site dominating the city of Tokyo, Mr. Matsukata decided that the gallery should become a " Kyoraku Bijutsu Kwan "—a " Sheer Pleasure Arts Pavilion."

It is of great importance that the exact meaning of this name should be rightly understood. At first I imagined that " Sheer Pleasure Arts " was a flowery Japanese manner of expressing the *fine* arts in contra-distinction



from the *applied* arts, which are not *sheer* pleasure; but the meaning is far deeper, as the following explanation and description of the place and of the principles that prompted them shall show.

Situated on a hill in the centre of Tokyo, and approached by flights of steps, the one-storey building in Japanese brick work will rise in a quadrangular shape from a paved terrace, studded here and there with groups of trees and surrounded by parapet walls. The overhanging roofs are covered, except for the skylights, with Japanese pipe tiles. The fabric itself is ornamented only with a mosaic frieze formed by the reddish bricks themselves, here and there enhanced with black and white tiles. There is, on the outside, no other kind of embellishment, except a portico in front of the main entrance. Around the paved inner court runs a cloistered ambulatorium with round arches, and a very simple ornamental fountain



occupies its centre. A Japanese sunk garden connects the main building with an annexe in which furniture and other works of applied art will be exhibited.

Visitors on entering will approach the Exhibition Galleries of the main building through a vestibule, with a yellow stone fountain in the centre. The walls here, as throughout, will be a plain warm grey, the roof timbers and doors being made of teak. The vaulted ceiling of the vestibule will be incrustated with a blue and gold mosaic. Stained glass windows are the only ornamental feature here, otherwise the whole of the interior is intended to be unadorned and simple to the point of austerity.



The galleries will have an interior skylight as well as the exterior glass roofing, and provision is made for regulating both the quality and the quantity of light to be admitted, as well as for ventilation, the latter, owing to great heat and dampness, being a very necessary feature.

As thus described, Brangwyn's place is so bare and so simple as to be apparently without vice or virtue. But we have yet to explain its principal feature and main excellence.

A public Gallery—if we be but quite honest about it—is æsthetically, an impossibility. It may be useful from the student's point of view ; but the public in most cases gets, if any, the wrong kind of pleasure from the



wrong kind of picture; the right kind of pleasure being seriously disturbed by the wrong way of display which PUBLIC exhibition makes inevitable. There are certain works of art, pictures and sculpture, which were created for predestined places and fixed spaces; such works torn from their environment are manifestly out of their element in a Gallery. There are others which represent the equivalent of a poem, or a piece of music in space art: they should be seen in perfect spatial isolation—the equivalent of *silence* in the other arts—and that isolation is quite impracticable. I am not only referring to the coming and going of visitors, which must be facilitated rather than hindered, as they are, by such special isolating devices as small rooms or “bays,” but also to the mutual interference of the works with each other. To the eye it is sometimes as difficult to concentrate on a picture in an exhibition as it would be to the ear if it attempted to hear Debussy with Wagner on one side and Offenbach on the other. As a matter of fact, picture exhibitions often remind one in their general aspect of “band-practices,” and sculpture exhibitions of “dancing-lessons.” The picture which “shouts” loudest, and the figure which gesticulates most, get most attention, and the kakophony and unrest is increased where the walls add to the din and turmoil serpentine green, damask red, and gilt bronze, or stucco, or similar “beauty.”

So the greatest fitness that can be achieved in the planning of a *public* gallery is a combination of negative rather than positive features; of virtues of omission rather than commission.

This is precisely what Brangwyn has aimed at. He relies in the interior almost entirely on the light, on the just proportion of the wall spaces, on the neutrality of the colour scheme, and on the absence of architectural ornament to produce the right kind of environment for a heterogeneous collection of Art. True, the





vestibule will contain his stained glass, on which the donor insisted, because Stained Glass is a typically Western achievement ; but the vestibule will contain nothing with which the coloured lights might interfere. On the contrary, the basin of water in its centre will reflect the lights and the blue and gold mosaic, and thus transform it into a fountain of kaleidoscopic beauty.

For the rest, Brangwyn's idea is that " the Sheer Pleasure Arts Pavilion " is to give this sheer pleasure, not only as a result of its contents ; he has



taken great care that the visitor on leaving the building, either to enter the inner gardens and cloisters, or the outer terrace, shall be surprised and delighted with the play of sunlight and shadows on the natural scenery that will be before his eyes. " Are the shadows of trees dancing in the breeze, cool upon a sunlit wall, not in themselves beautiful decoration ? " he asks. " The plans have carefully preserved all the tree groups, so that this may happen, and the dark shadows cast by the arches have been carefully planned as part of the architectural decoration. There will be flowers in



the garden, and a murmuring fountain, and the panoramic view of Tokyo and its harbour, and the Sacred Fuji in the distance will be seen framed as so many everchanging pictures through the arches, or from the open tree-bordered terrace. The contrast of the beauty of nature and the beauties of art in reciprocal action, that is what I aimed at. . . ."

There is little chance that Brangwyn's aim and achievement will be recognised, consciously, by the Japanese public, any more than it would be by ours. One can hardly doubt that something "handsome" like our Tate Gallery, with its sumptuous "Turner Wing," that puts Buckingham Palace into the shade, would find more conscious public appreciation.

As a Japanese artist once confessed to me about his own people, and, as we are never tired of declaring ourselves: "We are not an artistic nation."

"We" never are.

## XXIII. THE "SELFRIDGE" BUILDING DECORATIONS.

(MOSAIC)

**T**HERE are three ages of architecture : In the first, the greatest and most splendid buildings are erected to the Glory of Gods ; in the second, to the Honour of Princes ; in the third, to the "Advantage of Commerce." Beginning with the Parthenon, one passes through Versailles, and ends perchance, in the vicinity of Oxford Circus, a sort of "descensus Averno," at the completion of which one is left in doubt whether "the advantage of commerce" and "gloria Dei" are haply one and the same thing.

Of course it is possible to look upon commerce and its place in the hierarchy of human endeavour from many points of view, and as the work we have to discuss in this chapter owes its inspiration to a prince of commerce, who has given his answer to the question : "What then are we here for?" specifically, it is best to let him state his point of view in his own words, and with his own emphases.\*

"....of all golden chances, of all departments of endeavour, none, *none* presents such infinite and kaleidoscopic, always changing opportunities as does the broadest, surest field of effort, called COMMERCE—a field yielding *its rich harvest* in quick response to *well directed energy*—



\* "The Romance of Commerce," by H. Gordon Selfridge. John Lane.









FIRST DESIGN FOR THE MOSAIC DECORATION OF  
THE DOME IN THE NEW SELFRIDGE BUILDING.





a field to be looked upon, if we will, as surrounded with beautiful flowers, fragrant always with wonderful Romance."

The *rich harvest* is represented by the profits to be made, and of these, the same writer says in another passage :

"The head of such a house must make of business a great game which he loves for the game's sake and never tires of playing. The cold profits in pounds sterling, in dollars, francs or marks, must represent simply the counters in the game—desirable in themselves, but not the only prize."

This is not the place to comment on such statements or to question their validity.

They explain, however, sufficiently the temperament that decided on the grandiose Oxford Street building scheme and the choice of an Artist of Brangwyn's calibre to assist in it, is further accounted for by the following utterance :

"It is also well to remember that beauty is always of advantage to commerce."\*

Which perchance may be what it is here for. It stands a poor enough chance otherwise, anyhow. Brangwyn, temperamentally stimulated by every opportunity offered him for the solution of new æsthetic problems, accepted the suggestion that he should decorate the interior under the dome of the tower, designed by Sir John Burnet, and which Mr. Selfridge intends shall crown his building scheme. With great interest Brangwyn saw in the offered commission, not a means of advancing commerce, but a chance to exercise his craft and genius in a manner calculated to give the spectators—



\* Reported in *The Observer* of March 11, 1923.



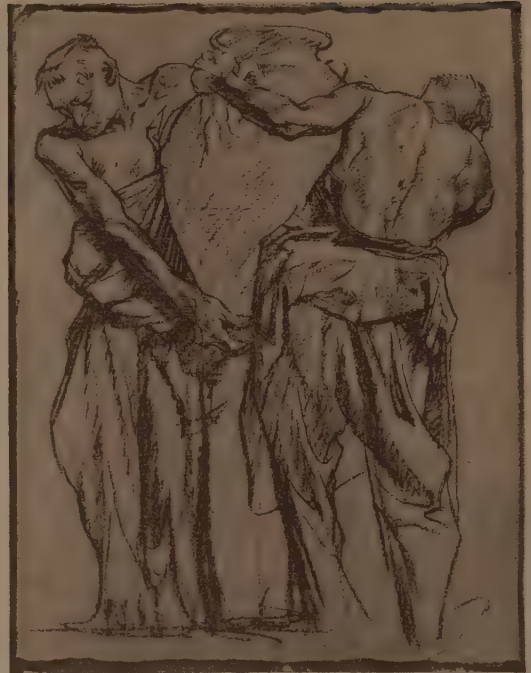
whoever they might be — eye pleasure.

The problem presented to him was to embellish the circular dome, the crown of which is about 130 feet from the ground-floor level, with mural decorations.

The diameter of the dome at its widest is to measure seventy feet, the height of the window arches through which the upper portion of the Tower receives its light, is twenty-four feet, the width of the soffites (*i.e.*, the underside and inside of the arches) is eighteen feet, the height of the pendentives twenty-four feet. The superficial area of the perpendicular spaces is 3168 feet super; the area of the dome itself is 4700 feet. These figures though only roughly computed from plans will give an idea of the spaces the Artist has to cover. The planning of such a decoration would have to be founded on two congruous bases: the practical and the æsthetical.

Let us consider the practical questions first.

London is not Rome, Venice, nor Parma; the air during the greater part of the year is dense enough to be visible at a distance of twenty feet or less, and to make interior decorations all but invisible at a distance of less than fifty feet. This air, it must be further remembered, is not all air, but to a varying, though considerable extent, soot. The Artist must in such circumstances resign himself to the knowledge that his work will appear more or less blurred and indistinct in detail during the greater part of the year, and almost invisible under a coating of "atmospheric residues" in less than a decade. The latter difficulty might be somewhat mitigated if instead of fresco, or even oil painting (which latter is subject to "internal"





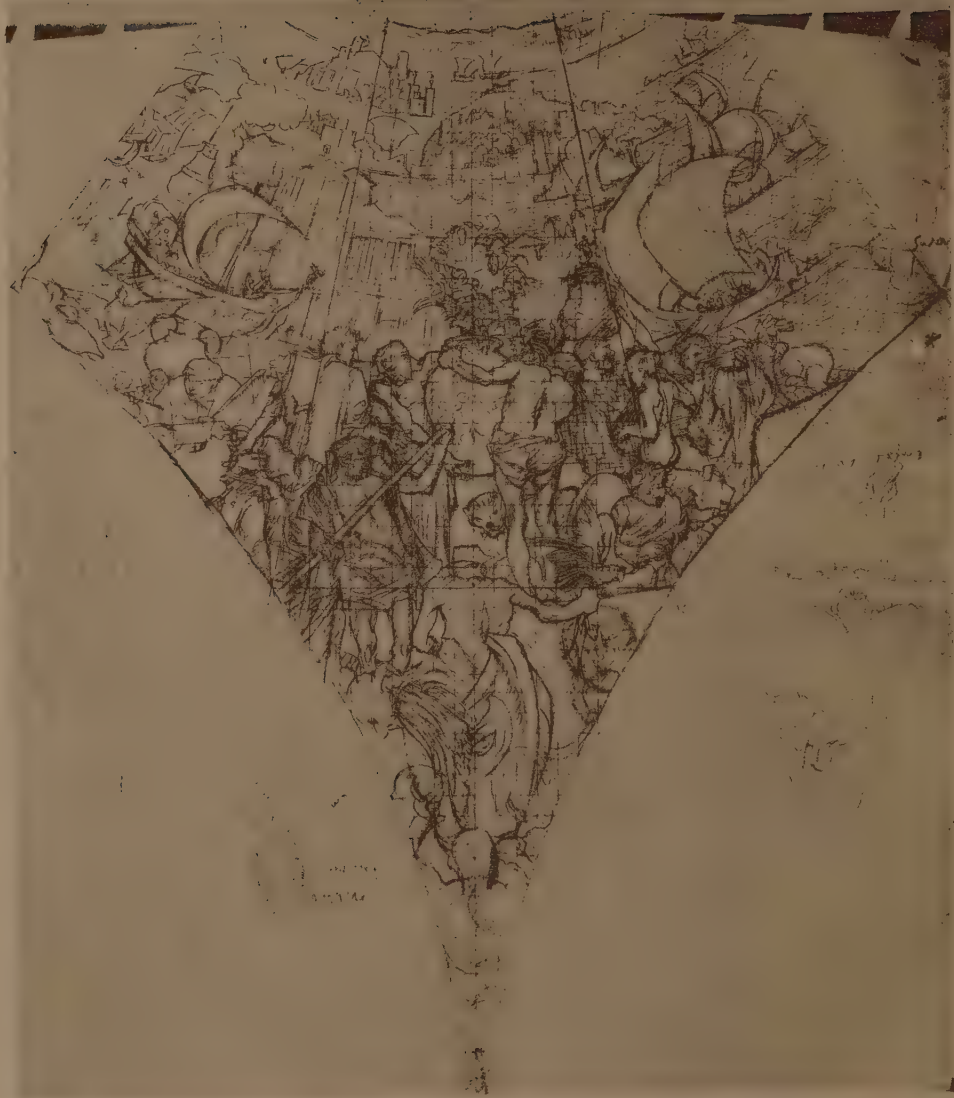
DESIGN FOR THE MOSAIC DECORATION OF THE  
DOME IN THE NEW SELFTRIDGE BUILDING.





LIFE STUDIES FOR THE SELFRIDGE BUILDING DECORATION





SKETCH DESIGN FOR THE MOSAIC OF THE SELFRIDGE DECORATION

changes) mosaic were resorted to. Brangwyn consequently decided upon this medium.

The craft of mosaic decoration is however, in itself, capable of various treatment. The smooth, modern Venetian kind, which is pictorial, is at present held in disrepute, the old, rough and primitive kind of mosaic to be found in Ravenna and Palermo being considered superior. But, as Brangwyn points out, this superiority is very questionable, and in any case should not be attempted in countries like ours. The primitive mosaic in which the *tesserae* are built up from the front into a bed of adhesive material, presents different facets to the light which they reflect, thus resolving the design into a network of sparkles, that instead of increasing the intensity of the colours, on the contrary destroys them. Moreover, under the Southern sun, comparatively dark spaces receive their lighting not so much directly from above, but indirectly from its reflection on the ground. Furthermore, in a city like London, soot and dust settle very quickly upon every available ledge or projection, however small, and so tend to diminish still further the carrying power of the colours. Brangwyn, for such reasons, gives the smooth modern method, by which the *tesserae* are first arranged and stuck face downward on paper and subsequently pressed into the cemented wall, preference. Done in this manner, nothing less than the destruction of the walls themselves will affect the mosaic, which moreover, will not harbour dust and can easily be washed.

From the æsthetical point of view the problem presents a considerable number of difficulties. From the ground level, the decorations on the vertical walls will at their distance, be hardly if at all visible—all that will be seen more or less plainly is the ceiling decoration. As regards



this latter kind in general, Brangwyn felt and feels that, æsthetically, its only justifiable form is the one adopted by the Egyptians, who treated the ceiling as if it were the blue night-sky showing between the rafters, or the Moorish style, which covered the ceiling with an abstract and "all-over" pattern.

The Western mind, always more attracted by nature-imitations, has preferred to use a device which is both less sensible than the Moorish and less truly "realistic" than the Egyptian devices. How secondary the decorative and how much more important the "imitative" qualities were in European estimation, is not only demonstrated by the development of mural decoration itself, but by the terms under which such work was undertaken, for instance, by the most famous ceiling decorator, Correggio himself.

His contract for the work in the Duomo at Parma, states :\* "The Master Antonio di Corigia shall engage to paint at his expense (?) the choir, the cupola with its arches and pillars, the frieze, the arcades and niches with their mouldings . . . decorating these with given subjects, which shall be either imitations of life, or of bronze, or marble. . . ." "Which shall be either imitations of life, or of bronze, or marble."



This phrase exemplifies the whole difference in outlook between the "West" of that age and the "East," which latter has since also modified ours to a great extent. In view of Correggio's, Michelangelo's or Tintoretto's, or any other Renaissance and Baroque master's ceilings and mural decorations, one can have no doubt that realism was aimed at. It was this fundamental desire for the "tromp d'œil" which inspired all these pseudo-arches, niches, balustrades, these flying clouds and angels, these saints and goddesses floating wingless in defiance of gravitation through space ; it was this, above

\* From Selwyn Brinton's "Correggio." London, 1900, Geo. Bell & Sons.

all, which called forth the clever and cunning, but impossible and untrue foreshortenings. And all this had only one purpose : to deceive the eye of the beholder, and incidentally to impress him with the inordinate skill of the artist. These aims ended bathetically in "imitations of life," hovering between painting and sculpture, to which I have already alluded.





Brangwyn, conscious of the fact that a ceiling decoration with "imitations of life" is at best an established practice, authenticated by such masters as Michelangelo, whose Sistine Ceiling is as "unfit" as any such decoration could well be, has endeavoured both in the Missouri Capitol, and in the Selfridge Tower to effect a compromise which would give the convention a little more æsthetic life.

In the Missouri Capitol Dome he arranged a composition of allegorical figures in such a way that each is connected with the other and with the adjoining walls by an open framework, so that, looking at the composition as a whole, it forms an organic pattern covering the ceiling, but not destroying its structure. The eye sees here not so much an "imitation of life," not a purely ornamental design, as a combination of the two, the pattern being both abstract and structural, without entirely destroying its imitational elements, which are nevertheless sufficiently reticent in colour and modelling not to create any uncomfortable feeling of solidity and weight.

In the Selfridge Dome on the other hand, the Artist, paying due regard to the distance from which it will be seen, ordinarily, has based his design on an annular and concentric plan.

That "inverted bowl" which here takes the place of the sky, Brangwyn has treated as if it were an inverted globe upon which are depicted the historic landmarks of civilisation, encircled by the commerce-bearing ocean. The design rather reminds one of ancient charts and maps upon which one may see shipping and buildings drawn without any regard for actual optic relationship and truth, but which for all that are full of symbolic significance. Brangwyn, for instance, has troubled here to illustrate the historic development of shipbuilding and given each quarter its characteristic architecture, its own fauna and flora.

The effect of the dome from the distance will thus become one of a light and rich colour scheme, which visitors to the gallery that is to run round it at the foot of the window arches, will be able to decipher.

The ceiling terminates in four pendentives, allegorising the present and the past commercial peoples: the Phœncians, the Greeks, the Venetians.

It may help the reader to gauge the bigness of the task, to learn that some of these figures are sixteen feet high, and that every detail was so drawn in the cartoons, that the mosaic worker will be able to follow the indicated position of every single tessera. This is, however, only the

physical side of the effort; the mental strain involved was far greater. The Artist has had to plan his working drawings to scale, a matter of considerable difficulty where curved surfaces are concerned that are not in actual existence and where, in consequence, the design has to make special provision for the distortion of perspective.

The planning of the decorations for the soffites of the arches was a comparatively simpler matter. Brangwyn's æsthetically fertile imagination evolved a series of richly coloured compositions which are unusual, because



more strictly logical than the conventional treatment of such spaces in this respect. The subject matter is an allegory of the peoples, the merchandise, the fauna and flora characteristic of the different quarters of the globe from England to the Pacific Isles. Brangwyn, in order to overcome the "uncomfortable" aspect which the imitation of sky and clouds on the soffites would give, has covered these parts with trees, foliage and trellis work. Thus the eye, finding a dark pattern where there would otherwise be a light and empty space, communicates no obvious sense of insecurity to the subconscious mind.

The Artist, nevertheless, insists that all such forms of mural decoration are merely compromises and only to be judged as such, his view being that in the strictly æsthetic sense, an abstract pattern is the best. Such extreme and incorruptible æstheticism would, however, serve the "advantage of commerce" as little as it has been found to serve the advantage of other and older "religions."

## XXIV. STREET DECORATION

**T**O those who naturally care for Art in all its many ramifications it will ever be a matter of regret that the Reformation robbed us of the solemnity and on the other hand of the gaiety which the numerous processional ceremonies of the Roman Catholic Church imparted at times to our Streets. Artists in particular should not forget that Picture-Exhibitions are a direct off-shoot of the Corpus Christi Day procession, on which occasion the housefronts were decorated with carpets and with "sacred" pictures. Eventually the sacred paintings by, what had meantime become, "the Old Masters" were supplemented with "modern" works of a "profane," *i.e.*, popular nature and landscape or *genre* subjects could be seen in these open-air exhibitions, which were the precursors of the Academic picture





shows. These ecclesiastical processions, however, were directly responsible for displays of temporary street decorations, consisting of Altars erected at certain intervals in accordance with the ritual of the church, and often of a most elaborate nature. Next to the gradual decline of the Church, occasioning even in Catholic countries a considerable reduction in pomp and splendour, the democratic spirit has robbed our artists of other opportunities to display their talents. No longer are our monarchs and princes welcomed on every possible occasion with Triumphal displays and pageants, such as were customary whenever a prince made an entry into a city, nor must it be thought that such things were confined to the more congenial south of Europe. To give a slight idea of the opportunities artists had in those days, and at the same time to show how real a thing Allegory, the great element of conventional decoration, was in the sixteenth century, the following description may serve. The reader will, after reading this, be able to measure the difference of present-day atmosphere. Be it remembered that such ceremonies, processions and Triumphal entries took place in the midst of a life and death struggle of a nation.

The occasion for the festivities described in the following lines was the foundation of the University of Leyden.

"The university having been founded, endowed and supplied with its teachers, it was solemnly consecrated in the following winter, and it is agreeable to contemplate this scene of harmless pedantry, interposed, as it was, between the sets of the longest and dreariest tragedy of modern time. On the 5th of February, 1575, the city of Leyden, so lately the victim of famine and pestilence, had crowned itself with flowers. At seven in the morning, after a solemn religious celebration in the Church of St. Peter, a grand procession was formed. It was preceded by a military escort, consisting of the burgher militia and the five companies of infantry stationed in the city. Then came, drawn by four horses, a splendid triumphal chariot, on which sat a female figure arrayed in snow-white garments. This was Holy Gospel. She was attended by the four Evangelists, who walked on foot at each side of her chariot. Next followed Justice, with sword and scales, mounted, blindfold, upon a unicorn; while those learned doctors, Julian, Papinian, Ulpian, and Tribonian, rode on either side, attended by two lackeys and four men-at-arms. After these came Medicine, on horseback, holding in one hand a treatise on the healing art, in the other a garland



of drugs. The curative goddess rode between the four eminent physicians Hippocrates, Galen, Dioscorides, and Theophrastus, and was attended by two footmen and four pike-bearers. Last of the allegorical personages came Minerva, prancing in complete steel with lance in rest, and bearing her Medusa shield. Aristotle and Plato, Cicero and Virgil, all on horse-back, with attendants in antique armour at their back, surrounded the daughter of Jupiter, while the city band, discoursing eloquent music from hautboy and viol, came upon the heels of the allegory. Then followed the mace-bearers and other officials, escorting the orator of the day, the newly appointed professor and doctors, the magistrates and dignitaries and the body of the citizens generally completing the procession.

Marshalled in this order, through triumphal arches, and over a pavement strewn with flowers, the procession moved slowly up and down the different streets and along the quiet canals of the city. As it reached the Nun's Bridge, a barge of Triumph, gorgeously decorated, came floating slowly down the sluggish Rhine. Upon its deck, under a canopy enwreathed with laurels and oranges, and adorned with tapestry, sat Apollo, attended by the Nine Muses, all in classical costume; at the helm stood Neptune with his trident. The Muses executed some beautiful concerted pieces; Apollo twanged his lute. Having reached the landing place, this deputation from Parnassus stepped on shore and stood awaiting the arrival of the procession. Each professor, as he advanced, was gravely embraced and kissed by Apollo and all the Nine Muses in turn, who greeted their arrival besides with the recitation of an elegant Latin poem. This classical ceremony terminated, the whole procession marched together to the cloister of St. Barbara, the place prepared for the new University, where they listened to an eloquent oration by the Rev. Caspar Kolhas, after which they partook of a magnificent banquet. With this memorable feast, in the place where famine had so lately reigned, the ceremonies were concluded."\*

A Pageant, dozens of Triumphal Arches, Triumphal cars and barges went to celebrate this occasion, in which practically the whole city took part. Nor was such celebration by any means isolated, even in these times of storm and stress; often they followed one another at intervals of only a few months.

"Nous avons changé tout cela." To our eyes these ceremonies, "entries" and "celebrations," these "welcomes" and addresses, these

\* Motley's "Rise of the Dutch Republic."

fantastic arches, triumphal cars and barges seem absurd, pedantic, and ridiculous. We can no longer take part in such things—we expect spectacles to be provided for us, and expect a lot for our money. Whenever upon rare occasions, such as Coronations, or Peace Celebrations, we feel that “something ought to be done,” we grudgingly make a grant out of the rates and give “the job” to the lowest tender. Our flags and bunting, our aniline dyed paper garlands and festoons, our banal illuminations, are but blatant testimonials of the poverty which distinguishes all our communal existence, surely deserving of greater censure than the naiveté, pomposity and pedantry of our forefathers. We no longer *live* Art and hence, the Piero di Cosimos, the Durers, the Rubens of our times seem to us but rather unbalanced and superfluous creatures, whose suggestions and advice it is safer not to follow.

It is greatly to Brangwyn’s credit that he has tried, consistently, to revive public interest in Street Decoration—though his ideas have met, of course, with strenuous opposition from the bureaucratic minds of police and City Councils. He produced the most tempting designs, his vivid imagination peopling them with gorgeous processions. On one occasion he introduced elephants passing through a Triumphal arch. He was ridiculed. Why elephants? they asked. But why not? If a Coronation procession is to express our Joy, why not make it joyful? Why, if we may legitimately introduce for decorative purposes flags and bunting, and flowers and gilded coaches, why should we eschew the use of live animals, together with Man, for the same end?

In conjunction with Sir Aston Webb and Sir William Richmond, Brangwyn offered to undertake the Decoration of Westminster Streets on the occasion of the King’s Coronation. Not only did these artists offer their services for nothing, they even went so far as to guarantee a part of the necessary funds—their offer was rejected. Brangwyn’s great and all-pervading conviction is the principle of unity in art; true to this he was anxious to see a manner of decoration adapted that would make a unit of a street-vista; that would not only link the housefronts with the street level, but that would also lend an architectural aspect to the long vista of the roadway. However, the scheme fell through, and only Bond Street was eventually to be decorated in the following manner:

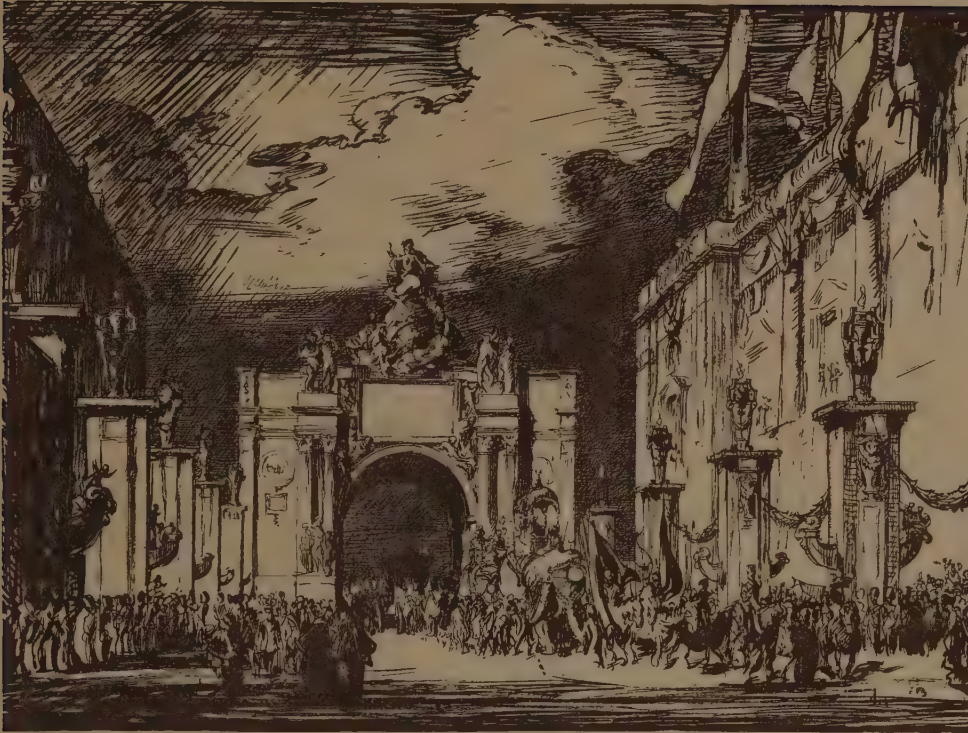
“At either end of the Street,” I quote from the description given in H. B. Wheatley’s *Short History of Bond Street Old and New*—“facing

Piccadilly and Oxford Street, the houses will be bridged with a light archway, draped with red hangings and garlands of laurel leaves, crossed with gold ribbon, while across the archway, in gold lettering, on a purple ground, will be an appropriate motto, intersected in the centre of an oval shield bearing the royal monogram. Below, on either side, there is to be a gilded cornucopia, while a medallion will be suspended from the centre of the arch. On the summit the figures of St. George and the Dragon will stand out, and on the bases of the span there will be figures of the lion and the unicorn. From two flagstaffs will swing a laurel garland about sixty feet in length, while two large flags will hang from the flagstaffs. Passing beneath this archway, the spectator will have a clear vista down the street, and will see above him, at a height of about twenty-five feet, swung from side to side, a succession of gold cord cables, with tasselled ends, supporting triple "swags" of laurels, crossed with gold ribbon, and having in the centre large cartouches bearing the arms of the Empire, the Colonies, and the names of noted personages connected with the street.

"At each of the four crossways made by the intersection of streets running into Old and New Bond Streets, a canopy will be suspended over the centre of the roadway—a method of decoration quite new to England, as indeed is the whole scheme. The diameter of the circle at the base of the canopy will be about thirty feet—practically the same as its height from the roadway. Double laurel garlands will join the canopy to the four corners of the streets, the junctions being embellished with medallions. The lower rim of the canopy will be composed of a series of small medallions, linked by garlands of flowers. Falling in sweeping concave lines from a gigantic crown which forms the apex of the structure, there will be broad golden ribbons. The royal monogram, on a large oval cartouche, will depend from the rim of the canopy on either side."

That was the plan which, however, suffered considerably in execution. The troubles of a modern artist, who attempts such work are indeed almost comic. In this particular instance there were all sorts of unexpected difficulties to contend with. Says Brangwyn: "You start with a design all worked to scale and of course in well-thought-out proportion—that is: provided you've got the necessary money together, which is perhaps the most difficult task. Then you submit it to the necessary authority, who tell you that you must lower the arch, or its erection cannot be sanctioned ;





then perhaps a number of house owners object to having anything attached to their housefronts. Then you have to consult the police about your draperies, who again arbitrarily cut them short. Next you want your "swags" or garlands made, and have to order so many tons of laurel leaves ; you have to find girls to make the festoons and a place for them to work in. Then you are told that the decorations must not be erected beforehand ; you have to work all night, and in the middle of the night the workmen strike for higher wages—and when the job is almost done, down comes a heavy rain storm."

The Bond Street decorations were, then, by no means what the artist had intended. The arch was lowered, the canopy at the crossways had to disappear. Nevertheless, even in its mutilated aspect, it represented a



vast improvement upon the orthodox "bunting," or what Brangwyn calls "pocket handkerchief method" of street decoration.

Another Decoration actually completed, and under somewhat similar difficulties, was the Triumphal Arch erected for the Government of New Zealand at the cost of two thousand pounds. Again it is only the very colourless and much *censored* ghost of his original scheme. Briefly it was a Renaissance Arch, and as such in keeping with the buildings of Whitehall, but it was somewhat "pseudo" in its details, and stood isolated in the roadway. What deserves praise is its compactness and the solidity of its construction, but in spite of the bronze ornaments, the excellent portrait medallions by Professor Lantéri, and the colour note of the red draperies, it seemed to lack originality. One or two of his first projects, one of them entirely classic, the other a quintuple archway surmounted by an emblematical statuary group would have been much more interesting; most of all one would have preferred a third suggestion, in which the Arch is surmounted by a painting which would have given the colour note without the draperies. Rubens, as we know, exclusively employed the painted canvas for such purposes. Moreover there is always something incongruous in curtained drapery used for the decoration of open outdoor arches which the necessity of a colour note can hardly excuse.

This point brings us to Brangwyn's other projects for Street Decoration, in which he made prominent use of paintings by way of adding colour to the scene. These picturesque projects came to nothing. I fancy that, next to our innate parsimony, the already mentioned elephants which appeared in several of his designs were the main cause of the rejection of these schemes. To the official and municipal mind, elephants in a coronation procession of the King-Emperor would seem so much more fantastic and incongruous than the mahout of the British State in the uniform of an Elder Brother of Trinity House. What the *Illustrated London News* called "A heroic scheme for a Processional Route" represented a sketch of the Coronation procession headed by the aforesaid elephants passing along the imposingly decorated Route. The Arch shown here consisted of two pilasters supporting a huge allegorical painting with an arched top. Instead of the usual poles, twin standards, surmounted by small flambeaux are decorated with cartouches. These twin standards, placed at closer intervals than is usual, are connected with "swags" of laurels. The pictorial effect of the whole vista would



have been magnificent. Another "rough suggestion," thrown off hurriedly, to give the public some idea of what might be attempted, was in the "*Standard's*" description as follows :

"The noble Arch which Mr. Brangwyn has sketched is represented as standing in the centre of the Roadway at the bottom of Whitehall, with the Local Government Board Offices on the right. The procession is shown returning from the Abbey, and the figures of elephants are introduced simply as an indication of the size of the Arch and the approaches. The arch, which could easily be made of lath and plaster, is severely classic in design and a pure white in tone, with the exception of the figures. On the pediment, Britannia is seated on a globe, the centre of a gigantic group of statuary typifying the Empire, the surrounding figures being symbolical of the various oversea Dominions. In the spandrels are other figures emblematical of commerce, industry, civilisation, and power, with suitable inscriptions, while in the tablet in the centre there would be an appropriate

motto. The standards lining the route are reminiscent of the Roman *columnæ rostratæ*. On the tops of the columns are classic flambeaux, which could of course be lit at night, while the buildings along Whitehall would be aglow with brightly coloured masses of flags and bunting. Between the columns of the approaches to the arch are "swags" of flowers, richly modelled in plaster and gaily tinted. The swags could be illuminated by concealed lights, which would give a very rich effect at night. The arch itself should be flooded after dark with light from masked search-lights, hidden in neighbouring buildings." (Illustration on page 181.)

This sketch and description appeared in the *Standard* of February the 17th; by February 24th, 1911, the suggestion had become much more economical. The elephants had been duly eliminated; "The Stormy Sky," of the former design, which seems to have frightened some people had cleared; the arch was no longer "lath and plaster," but only painted canvas; the standards were merely poles, and the "illuminated swags" richly modelled and in gaily tinted and electrically lighted plaster and evergreens. After the painted arch had finally disappeared, and the scheme had been brought into line with the pocket handkerchief method, it was *partly* adopted—*sic transit*. . . .

When one remembers the immense love, labour and delight with which former generations used to throw themselves into the celebration of such events, and the industry, ingenuity and imagination, artists of James I. and Charles II. time put into their work, the task of the modern decorator seems a hopeless one; his public has no imagination, it shies at a perfectly possible and logical elephant where the citizens of Leyden cheered the impossible unicorn.

"It is not altogether gratifying to our national vanity," said '*The Builder*' of June 30th, 1911, "to read in the daily Press that our neighbours across the Channel consider our Coronation decorations are despicable, and quite below the standard of what would be accomplished in a small provincial town in their own country."

I am not familiar with Continental accomplishments in that direction, and it seems to me that we had better be *ourselves* with all shortcomings. The sad part rather is that we ourselves used to accomplish *more* in the past; it is our *past* rather than our neighbour, that has a right to reproach us. We have lost imagination.



This loss is made manifest in other directions. We have no enthusiasm for temporary, but still less for permanent, enterprises of a *decorative* nature.

I don't know whether London now possesses a Drake-Memorial, or how the activities of its America-inspired Organisation Committee finally ended ; at all events in 1912 there was such a Committee, and in the same year Brangwyn made a sketch of a grand idea he had for a Drake-Memorial : it was never carried out.

It is characteristic of the man who has made the sea and the sailor, the port and the docker, his special study and delight, and who has in spite of such humble associations achieved European fame, that he should have suggested the East End as a more desirable place for such a memorial than the genteel West. Brangwyn is too idealistic ; he forgets that the West is the Mecca even of " the working class," he overlooks the fact that even common people venerate genteel associations, so that the fantastic localities which he suggested as the right place for a Drake-Memorial such as " Hoxton,





Haggerston or Hackney," would scarcely have met with their approval, whilst one could not expect "Tomlinson of Berkeley Square" to wax enthusiastic about the East End or wherever these places may be. Not only was Hoxton or Haggerston in his mind, but he proposed to erect a memorial that was neither to be a Drake-Column nor yet a Drake-Statue, in fact, unless I am very much mistaken, the sculptured protrait statue of Drake was not introduced at all in his scheme, which was as follows :

A square somewhere in the East End, one of those dreary and depressing deserts of bricks and broken windows, enlivened only by the noise of innumerable children and the fury of filthy language of their elders, was to be turned into a harbour of refuge. Here a covered ambulatorium, a colonnade, was to encompass the four sides of the square. On the outer and inner walls of this cloisterlike building Brangwyn imagined the Story of Drake pictured in mosaic or coloured low relief. But in the centre of the square there should be a fountain surmounted by "the World" and supported by the Elizabethans, "who under and with Drake largely wrested the then new world from the hands of Spain, and so gave to the old world a new commercial field." The sphere on the fountain was to be a "clear crystal Globe" which at night should be illuminated by powerful electric light—typifying the light and life of adventure upon the high seas, which made England what it is.

Brangwyn's conception of the function of art is such that he attempts to make even a work of art a thing of use.

For all that Brangwyn is an idealist :

"Such a memorial," he said in 1912 to N.B.K. of the *London Budget* (December 8th) "would, I trust, light once again in the breasts of our youths the spirit of adventure practically killed now by the cigarette, the football craze and the music hall. If the sight of Drake's sea-fights on the frieze would give the loafer and the larrikin, idly smoking his cigarette in the cloister, the thirst for the sea and a free and healthier and more adventurous life, the money will have been well spent.

"There would be hope for England still, for remember that these are just the same sort of material out of which Drake made his seamen. Upon this material to-day Navy and Army depend, and, therefore, with them largely rests the fate of Empire."

So Brangwyn many years ago.

To-day many a "loafer and larrikin" wears his V.C., many a thousand more lie buried in graves named or nameless. Many an East-ender has proved himself a man worthy to be a companion of the New World-conquering Drake.

Brangwyn's Memorial still remains a dream, and the Empire has been saved without its assistance. These loafers and larrikins knew how to *die*: it's an instinct; but to know how to *live* is an art, in which not only "loafers and larrikins" are but sad bunglers.

Inveterate idealist that Brangwyn is, he suggested an imaginative scheme for the great River pageant that was to have marked the Peace in 1919. I believe there were a few boats on the river, but nothing like Brangwyn's suggestions was adopted. His idea was to disguise a large number of barges and motor boats in the manner of the accompanying illustrations, by the simple device of lath and plaster. It could have been done with comparatively little expense and with really magnificent effect. I quote the description of the illustration from the *Architectural Review* of December, 1919:

"In Mr. Frank Brangwyn's original design, the two state barges were gay with colour, on the left a blue and yellow vessel with red flags and a red canopy over the poop; on the right a vermillion barge with green garlands between bright-hued shields." The other sketch "shows a great peace float and Neptune riding a dolphin. The colour scheme is gold with bright blues and reds; all the figures were to be gilt and two and a half times life size. The dolphin and tritons were designed for motor launches. Unfortunately these splendid suggestions were not adopted in the actual pageant."

Of course not. To be quite fair, such suggestions should not come from the artists; it is not their function to make suggestions, but to carry them out. In other words Art is the mirror only of Life, which through the artists'—and here we must include poets' and musicians'—genius it reflects. The desire to have things done *with* art precedes the creation of works of art.

We may fitly consider here another branch of outdoor decoration which Brangwyn has also practised: Tombstones. Most modern "God's acres" are abominations.

"Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree's shade,  
Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap"

Well, one is reconciled to these mouldering heaps there, but it is a far cry from Gray's Churchyard to Kensal Green. "Oh, death, where is thy sting?" that question is often answered by the Tombstone and its epitaph.

However, since people will have such things, it is as well that an artist such as Brangwyn should have attempted to substitute for the broken



SUGGESTION FOR DECORATED BARGES IN THE RIVER PAGE

column, the sham urn, the wooden crosses made of marble, and the weeping angels which may be ordered by the gross, simple stones of well considered proportions and quiet outlines, decorated only with an appropriate design in low relief. A quite charming design of his—if one may speak of charm in relation to such things—was a grave monument for a small child; it represented a stone cradle.



THE OCCASION OF THE CORONATION OF KING GEORGE V.



## XXV. STAINED GLASS

**S**TAINED Glass as a means of artistic expression is potentially, at least, immeasurably more powerful than any other form of painting, seeing that its colours are not only pigments but dyed light. On the physical plane alone, therefore, the stained glass window has an effect upon the senses which resembles that of music. Were we able to exclude intellect entirely from our organs of sense, coloured light would still affect us, and affect us, too, as immediately as sound affects the ear, scent the nose, and food the palate.

Stained glass, like so many other works with a powerful æsthetic and emotional appeal, has its origin in pure utility. The object of the window pane is, in the first place to keep out the weather and to let in the light. This was originally attempted with the aid of various transparent materials, amongst them glass. The primitive glassmaker, however, found it impossible to produce sheets of glass both large in size and pure in colour; he had to content himself with a sort of patchwork of small pieces of uneven tint and surface, which he arranged in a conventional pattern and joined together with lead. It was not, apparently, till the end of the tenth century that windows with figured representations were introduced, but even so the manner of design, dependent as it was on the nature of the material to hand, remained akin to mosaic until the twelfth century. With the advent of the Gothic style, and the consequent curtailment of wall space, the craft of glassmaking improved, and the art of the stained glass window reached its zenith.

The reformation, that is to say the condemnation of religious subjects



and the transition from the window-full walls of the Gothic to the solid walls of Renaissance architecture brought about a sudden change and an eventual decline. The change was the substitution of comparatively large size pieces requiring less leading, and allowing more scope for actual painting. The design and the painting became less "glassy" and more "papery"; the *nature* of the material was overcome. There was more technical knowledge in these windows, but also less emotional power. By the end of the seventeenth century the art had practically died out. In the eighteenth century efforts were made to recover, not so much the art as the craft; æsthetically the design was—as Sir Joshua Reynolds' Oxford window proves—still pictorial and "papery."

The improvement of technical knowledge and a half romantic, half political neo-Gothic movement, caused renewed interest in this branch of art, which, with another change of direction, still persists. The art of dyed light is, however, destined to conquer new fields, apart altogether from the stained glass window.

It must be clear that this rise and fall, stagnation, revival and change was necessarily accompanied by corresponding variations in the æsthetic or emotional effect of the stained glass. The philosophic historian can trace parallels between the dark intricate theologic mysticism and the dim religious "lights" of the early stage, followed by a highly coloured romantic spirit in thought and in "glass," declining into technical and scientific methods of thinking and glass making, eventually endeavouring to rise once more by a combination of scientific means with new æsthetic aspirations.

The modern craftsman, with his eyes upon the windows of Chartres, marvels at the æsthetic culture which these old designers and makers of stained glass possessed, dreams himself emotionally into the past or whets his intellect on the problem of rivalling the ancients' achievement.

To these dreams we owe the failures of the nineteenth century, for failures these efforts of the neo-mediævalists must be called, since they no longer correspond to the spirit of the times. The twelfth, thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth century designers and makers were above all things modern and topical: they did not dream, they felt; they did not imitate, they expressed; their æsthetic success, however, was as much due to technical limitation as to æsthetic ability. We know more to-day about Mediæval times than any individual of those ages could possibly have known.

Modern Science can produce glass of greater size, purity and brilliance, and of a far wider range of colours, than the old glass makers and designers could have hoped to produce. There is no longer any necessity for the ancient manner of glass mosaic : there is no longer any need for the laborious leading of small pieces : it is now possible to fuse different colours, to weld different pieces together into a body, and to give to this body a variety of tones and modelling by varying its thickness. Tiffany, in New York, has produced glass in this manner, though, as we shall presently note, this technique has other defects. Yet because we *know* more in all these respects,



we cannot do better than the artists who knew less, unless we give up *imitation* and essay creation. A little knowledge may be a dangerous thing ; for all that, much knowledge is even more dangerous, especially in matters which concern that incalculable something we call "soul."

Ultimately the test of a work of art seems to be the nicest possible balance between the matter and the means of expression ; and the work fails to the degree to which one is in excess of the other.

Brangwyn, true to his temperament, ventured into the designing of cartoons for stained glass as he has ventured into so many other branches of art, without any pre-conceived notions or ideas, or theories. He has neither the spirit of the æsthetic reformer nor the curiosity of the scientific technician.

He supplies the cartoons, and, like Dürer or Holbein, is content to



leave the carrying out to the professional craftsman, taking care only that the latter interprets his design in the right spirit.

Intuitively Brangwyn holds the conviction that, since Stained Glass is not the same as the "stained cloth," it should not imitate a picture but should show in its design the manner and the material employed. On the other hand, since it is not necessary to use small pieces, it is desirable to be sparing in the leading, without, however, attempting to confine the leads strictly to the contours of the figures or objects represented. Furthermore, since the windows contain figures, he prefers to employ the colours pictorially rather than in mosaic-like and intricate conventional pattern. And lastly, since he works for the living, he sees no purpose in archaistic design, nor in the separation of the "lights" from each other: his windows, therefore, treat the whole space as a single unit.

It is due to these simple and obvious considerations that Brangwyn's cartoons for stained glass preserve a characteristic individuality which the actual craftsman can either improve upon or spoil, according to the measure of his abilities and adaptableness, but cannot entirely destroy.

The first designs furnished by Brangwyn were intended for execution in Tiffany glass. Mr. Tiffany's ventures are well-known; he made intensely interesting specimens of glass in which wonderful colours were fused in such a manner as to produce hitherto unimagined effects. If this innovation led to excellent results in the individual pieces, a further





innovation which he also attempted eventually defeated its own ends. This consisted in producing effects of light and shade by varying the thickness of the glass itself. This, however, resulted in the production of unevennesses on the surface which caught and harboured the dust and so stultifying the very effect they were intended to give. For this reason Tiffany Glass has to be protected by sheets of plate glass, and so, since dust-proof protection is in cases of windows impossible in the long run, becomes impractical.

Brangwyn made several cartoons for this purpose. The best, undoubtedly, is the splendid "Baptism of Christ." Not having seen the glass, I can only judge the cartoon, which is among the artist's best designs. Without the least trace of mediævalism, it has an impressive grandeur and static dignity. It combines interesting details of realism (compare the types of heads in the background and the foot of the Baptist), with symbolic formation (compare the treatment of flowers, trees, the dove and the rays, which are used with splendid effect). The leading, too, is of particular interest; there is no attempt to make the leaded line coincide in every respect with the contours of the drawing (compare the line across the arm and around the hands of Christ, or the two leads crossing the arm of the Baptist), and yet the leads are so arranged that they strengthen the composition immensely (compare the treatment of the rays). What makes this cartoon superior to the drawing of the Nymphs and Satyr (also for Tiffany's) is the absence of the curve as a mainstay of the composition. The otherwise charming pagan idyll suffers mainly through the insistence of the curved contour lines of the two bare backs in the finished window—in the sketch these outlines keep their place in the general scheme, which differs also in other respects.



Another unquestionably good cartoon of the same period is: "Youth and Age," in which one may notice once more how sound the oft-mentioned composition of vertical and horizontal main lines is in tectonic qualities.

Brangwyn's conception of the glass window is essentially pictorial; he wishes to preserve a certain quality of realism, both in the types of his figures and in the arrangement of his composition. That is to say that he makes no use of Gothic





STUDY FOR THE WINDOW IN THE CON-  
GREGATIONAL CHURCH AT NORTHAMPTON.

canopy and other architectural framework for his figures, the subject is represented without ornamentation. In his earlier cartoons, such as "Music" and "Harmony," the composition betrays a little of the naturalism of the period, it has not the architectural dignity of the "Baptism," which latter looks as if it belonged to another period.

In his most recent work Brangwyn has surpassed these earlier designs for Stained Glass. It casts a strange reflection on the mentality of London, that the greatest city of the Empire cannot pride itself on possessing a specimen of the finest and most interesting Stained Glass made in England in modern times; for that it is necessary to travel miles into the country and to visit either the little but ancient Church at Bucklebury in Berkshire, or the fair-sized and very new Congregational Church in Abington Avenue, Northampton.

The contrast between the two places of worship is striking. In the building at Bucklebury six centuries have left their traces, and the very stones seem to be wearing away, less through age than through an effort to remember what they have long forgotten. In Abington Avenue all is new, white and tidy, and the keen-edged stones seem anxious to memorise the truths that are so hard to learn. One has, I know not why, the feeling that Bucklebury takes its heart to church and Abington Avenue its head. Both these churches have windows designed by Brangwyn: Northampton one large one; Bucklebury a large and two small ones in the sanctuary, and a fair-sized one in the nave. In both cases the windows are Memorial Dedications. In Bucklebury they commemorate, in a fittingly feudal phraseology the Lordship of the Manor, in Northampton the victims of the greatest political catastrophe the world has yet experienced.

I did not myself notice the difference in spirit until it was brought home to me by "a description of the Memorial Window" kindly lent me by Mr. F. E. Fitness of Northampton, who was instrumental in securing the commission for the artist. In this anonymous "description" one reads: "Christ died that the world might be saved. So, too, let it be said in all reverence and with due regard to the





unique significance and splendour of that supreme surrender of the Saviour, died these young men of England on the bloodstained fields of Flanders, of France, of Italy and Gallipoli, in West and East, in all the far-flung battle lines of an Imperial Struggle. They followed in His footsteps."

Accustomed, as one is, to the sight of a naked sword crucified in lieu of Christ on war memorials, I expected, after this, to see at least a bomb dropping from the hand of Christ into the flowers below; but it was only old Adam's the hoary sinner's skull; for this window represents Golgotha and not Gallipoli.

It is the *dead* Christ Brangwyn surely was thinking of; the Christ who was slain so that Barabbas, the house and home breaker might live; the Christ who told Peter to put up his sword; the Christ who offered the other cheek, the Christ who drove the money changers out of the Temple; the Christ who went with publicans and sinners, the Christ who refused an Empire. . .

The window, with four lights, is in the East wall of the Congregational Church, but Congregational Churches have no altar: it goes against their reason; though why they should have a church at all is not quite easy to see, since Jesus did not break the bread or drink the wine in a sacred building.

I only mention this because there is an attempt at a spiritual rationality in this kind of Christianity, a rationality which, strictly speaking, does not accord well with Stained Glass.

Brangwyn's window is as yet the only coloured one there, and that is one of the reasons that it has an inexpressibly austere effect; there is no aid to religious emotion—the church is bathed in the white workaday light. The artist, whether by artistic or symbolic intention I cannot say, has





TO THE GLORY  
OF OUR WARRIORS

OF GOD AND TO  
HIS GLORY

IN MEMORY OF  
THE WARRIORS

THE MEN OF THE  
WAR OF 1861



eschewed the rich sensuous emotional blue and crimson, which do so much to sweep the intellect off its feet in other cases. Instead, the most conspicuous colours here are a green and a yellow in the coat of the figure on the right. The highest light is, fitly, the halo and the head of the Dead Christ, from whose body generally the light radiates upwards and outwards to the purplish bodies of the Thieves on the Cross. The assertive green, already mentioned, is balanced by the red hair of the child on the left. All the other colours are secondary and tertiary, blue-pinks, blue-greens, purples and blue-violets. The bluish dark sky with Cherubs' heads and white stars shows mysteriously through the tracery. Altogether the colour orchestration is quite unusual. The drawing of the figures and especially that of the dead Christ's features is of great dignity. The picture, despite its note of youth and its signs of hope in the blowing flowers, is solemn and, since the four lights are combined into one picture, of immediate and almost realistic appeal. The design was translated by Mr. Paul Turpin with more than intelligent faithfulness into glass.

The windows of Bucklebury Church produce an altogether different effect. Brangwyn probably felt instinctively that he was creating work destined to find its place in that emotional atmosphere which always fills and envelops ancient churches.

The great window over the simple Altar represents the Crucifixion. For sheer brilliance and emotional force of colour one would have to seek far and wide and would not find its equal ; certainly not in modern work. The colours are of every variety—far greater than the ancient glassmakers could produce—and they are *as colours* almost passionately beautiful and beyond my power to describe. Unfortunately, however, this very fact has militated against the clarity and beauty of the design. The composition and even the drawing itself is not faultless. The head of Christ is badly foreshortened. The figure of Christ—in linear perspective further away from the spectator, but in colour perspective nearer to him because the Artist rightly concentrates upon it the most light—appears too small. There are, it is true, passages of very great beauty of design and colour, for instance the figure of the mourning Magdalen and the weeping Madonna, as well as a number of fine character studies in the attendant persons. Nevertheless it seems that Mr. Sylvester Sparrow, who carried out the design, has rather overwhelmed the Artist's work with an effusion, I had almost said an





STAINED GLASS WINDOW IN BUCKLEBURY CHURCH

*explosion* of glory, in his desire to show that the modern makers of stained glass can surpass the ancient in richness and variety at staining.

If one must claim the right to criticise where it seems just and necessary, one must equally be permitted to express his unqualified admiration in other cases. Brangwyn's "Nativity" Window here is such a case. This window of three lights is in its way perfect. The design fits with complete but easy precision into the mullioned lights. The composition is perfectly simple, the drawing full of dramatic power and characterisation, and the beautiful colour scheme helps the definition. The orchestration, compared with the Crucifixion window, is very restrained. We have here not the outburst of reds and purples, orange, parrot green, crimson, yellow and so forth. There is one dominant warm colour, a curious chestnut red rather than brown in the cap and cloak of St. Joseph. The mantle of the Virgin is of course blue, and a wonderful blue it is. This blue is balanced on right and left by a rich green in the dress of the shepherds. The Infant Christ, realistically but very tenderly felt, rests on a bundle of golden straw, a colour which is repeated by accents on left and right. An excellent and unusual effect, dramatically, tectonically and colouristically is produced by the row of spectators looking over a wattle fence. This row forms a greenish grey neutral relief to the bold contrast of the lower part and the beautiful background above, with its blue mountain and sky scenery, in which the shepherds and their flocks and a distant view of moonlit Bethlehem may be detected.

It seems, however, futile to attempt a description; the window, like a musical composition, must be realised by direct contact with the senses. It is undoubtedly one of the finest things Brangwyn has done, and I think Mr. Sylvester Sparrow must also come in for his just meed of praise, since the success is due as much to the Artist's design as to its exceedingly skilful interpretation. In passing, one must note also that an excellent use has been made of scraping the shadows in lieu of the supposedly more "legitimate" cross-hatching and drawing.

There are two other smaller windows representing scenes from the life of St. Elizabeth. They are not visible from the nave, being set in walls of, I believe, more than two feet thickness. They are good in colour, but the three-tier design of St. Elizabeth giving Food to the Poor is not easily explained. (See pages 194 and 195.)

These windows in the little Bucklebury Church and the Congregational Church at Northampton will no doubt be visited, in times to come, by a generation more ready to appreciate their significance.









DECORATIVE PANEL: SWANS AND NASTURTIIUMS.

## XXVI. STILL LIFE PAINTING AND BRANGWYN'S CONCEPTION

**P**ERHAPS no form of pictorial art is more instructive in its development than "Still Life." Its recognition as a distinct branch of painting coincides with the gradual disappearance of the purely religious character of pictorial themes. Essentially northern and gothic in its spirit—gothic ornament, whether carved on the walls of a cathedral, or drawn on the margins of a missal, is in itself a species of ornamental still life—it is only natural that it has remained an essentially northern practice and accomplishment.

Still life deals as the name implies, mainly with objects that have no movement—the French "nature morte" is misleading, because flowers and fruit, and sometimes insects and even live animals, not excluding man, may form part of such subjects. Nevertheless it does as a rule depict vases, glasses, plates, napkins, bottles and other such things which are commonly regarded as devoid of interest, so that the admirer of "Still Life" is an exception amongst the general lovers of art. That this should be so is not surprising. Still life painting is not a primitive art: to take an interest in objects rather than in ideas associated extrinsically with them is a turn of the mind that is far from primitive.

Still life painting, which deals pre-eminently with objects as such, or at all events with objects apart from literary or symbolic association, did not spring Minerva-like fully panoplied into existence. On the contrary it crept slowly out of a literary or symbolic background into the forefront, presently to occupy the stage for itself alone. One feels often in early pictures that the artist was intensely interested in still life. Compare Van Eyck's painting of the mirror on the wall and the oranges on the window-sill of the "Burgomaster Arnulfini" portraits in the National Gallery, or the wealth of still life that accompanies Matsys' or Marinus' ubiquitous Miser or Moneychanger pictures; compare also the occasionally lavish display of fruit in Italian pictures such as Crivelli's. Nevertheless it would not have occurred to these Old Masters to content themselves with the rendering of such things as a sufficient *subject* for a picture. Even early

still life, such as Dürer' or Jacopo de' Barbari's must be taken as *studies*, not as pictures.

The real origin of still life must be sought at two sources. One sprang from the habit of decorating sacred pictures on "Fête" days with flowers, and so we find, say, a fifteenth century "Pietà" let into a seventeenth century panel, upon which an encircling garland of flowers has been painted; or we find a flower and fruit wreath decorating the Madonna and child painted as a bas relief; a little later the sacred image is naïvely replaced by a realistically rendered glass of wine. In this latter case, however, we are possibly touching the second source of inspiration. Still lifes springing from this origin generally contain representations of meat, fish, fruit, vegetables, stew pans, glasses, bottles, jugs, jars—in short things that may be found either on kitchen tables or sideboards. The kitchen table was "Mary and Martha's," the sideboard, "Simon the Pharisee's," and Mary and Martha, or the "Marriage feast of Cana" may sometimes appear as an insignificant incident in the background, Martha or the cook occupying a prominent place in the foreground, until they, too, disappear and leave the *Still Life* victorious. Painting that had begun as an almost purely religious service undertaken "in majorem dei gloriam" descended, so far as "subject matter" is concerned, in the hands of plump and prosperous Dutchmen to still life painted "in praise of the herring," which is the actual subject and title of one of them at least. But the public of the day was quite as anxious as the majority of our own age to have a "plot," so that the artist, whom possibly things appealed to for their own sakes, was constrained to give associative meaning to his still life pictures, and so we find some of them appealing to Mijneer's sense of values; golden goblets and expensive fruits, especially the then rare fruits of the South, being synthetised into a sort of allegory of plain thinking and high living, or on the contrary the introduction of a death'shead into such subjects turned them into a "memento mori" or possibly, with the addition of the then topical "smoker," into a symbol of the "vanitas vanitatum."

Though we have, occasionally, amongst seventeenth century painters of still life in men like Rembrandt and even Van Kalf, artists who valued the quality of *textures* over and above whatever associative meaning the objects might suggest, it is not till we reach the second quarter of the eighteenth century and Chardin, that this genus of painting really becomes an



independent art. Chardin, out of his very real and very simple love for things in *his* kitchen and on *his* sideboard, developed a manner of still life painting that had—apart from the clearly associative sense of *personal* contact with the object—an independent and very considerable æsthetic value. He filled his space with consummate mastery of composition, an extraordinary sense of light and colour values, together with a subtle appreciation of differences in textures. Other painters of the period used still life in an associative and decorative manner for the embellishment of walls with musical instruments, trophies of the chase or of war; but Chardin's conception is the one which the nineteenth century took up and developed. He is really the starting point of a branch of painting that found in Manet and Cézanne exponents who themselves were to become the forerunners of the Derain's and Picasso's and their disciples of to-day. From the manner in which the apple, for example, has undergone its transformation since it found its way from Chardin's sideboard into modern art, we can learn more about the development of painting, than by the comparative study of more intricate and ambitious themes.

Brangwyn's manner of still life painting is probably the result of two influences. We have from his brush subjects of this nature which suggest a Chardin-like love of humble things on the one hand, and others again which are reminiscent of the still life of Frans Snyders. You notice how persistent the hidden contrast—the Martha frugality and the Marriage Feast abundance re-appears. Brangwyn's Chardin-like still lifes are the earlier ones and generally of a smaller size: these are pictures proper. The others are the more recent ones, of a large size and full of brilliant colour; these are more properly to be regarded as Decorative panels. Brangwyn's innate love of big form and rich full colour orchestration makes him partial to full bodied things, such as pumpkins, vegetable marrow, oranges, tulips, cape gooseberries, carboys, big-bellied pots, garden-vases; with such things, and the possible addition of dead swans, or live swans for that matter, he builds up great patterns that require frames of twelve inch mouldings, and specially designed architecture for their setting. To hang them in exhibitions and galleries amongst easel pictures and "on the line" is to see them as they should not be seen, and cannot be judged.

A decorative panel with "Swans and nasturtiums," which was painted out of doors, is one of his happiest inventions, and remarkable also



for this reason : it is, so far as I know, the only picture based on the contrast of Nasturtium green and Nasturtium yellows ; strange that this humble weed, with its contrast of vigorous green and flaming flowers has not found more admirers.



## XXVII. FRANK BRANGWYN'S APPLIED ART

### GENERAL PRINCIPLES.

WHATEVER may be the case with "Fine Art," there ought to be no doubt nor difficulty about the governing principle of Applied Art. It is *use*. This term, however, must be interpreted rather differently than we are accustomed to do, since it includes many things which are strictly speaking of little or no *use* in the material sense: *e.g.*, parlour ornaments, a delightfully significant generic term, parlour being the place whither the little Bourgeois Housewife retires to "parley" with her nearest enemy—her neighbour. The ornaments in such places are set up mostly for the use and purpose of impressing the said enemy with the family's ancientness, wealth and good taste. This purpose is still maintained in homes that have instead of parlours, drawing rooms: it is very much the same thing, by whatever name it is called. Applied Art is not necessarily Art applied to useful things such as chairs and tables, but always to things in which associative are at least as great as æsthetic values.

But, indeed, when one comes to look into the question of "æsthetic" versus "association," one finds to his surprise that ultimately, instead of a steep and unbridgeable difference there is none—æsthetic appreciation itself being no more and no less than the surface manifestation of a pleasure caused by realisation of deepseated and subconscious association of ideas. This, however, is a question into which we cannot here enter.

The enemy of the æsthetics is not association itself, but false and inept exploitation of its values. The Neo-Gothic taste-reformers, for example, failed precisely because they were led astray by historical association; they, for instance, produced tapestry-like wall papers in imitation of the woven fabric. Even in more questionable taste, perhaps, was Herkomer's typewriting table designed in the Gothic manner, and Tadema's Grand piano in the Græco-Tadema style.

In works of applied art there is only one kind of *absolute* Beauty possible, and that is absolute actual or potential Usefulness. For that reason, for

example, a modern motor car will sometimes come very near to absolute beauty, *viz.*, when its structural lines are most closely suited to its purpose : safety in speed. So likewise a potter's bowl and a carpenter's chair may approach absolute beauty, whilst a china manufacturer's basin or a cabinet maker's chair may miss their mark because they are constructed on false associative principles.



When Brangwyn first launched out into applied art, the "Art Nouveau" in France and the "Jugendstil" in Germany represented a reaction which England had started against classic degeneration. In all three countries, however, this reaction was a deliberate æsthetic movement based partly on pure, partly on "associative" æsthetics. In consonance with his whole mental make-up Brangwyn's venture into the applied arts was not based on any such considerations. He took to the designing of chairs and carpets, of cabinets and door knobs, of fans and bedspreads, just as he later on took to architecture, because such commissions came his way, and because his mind delights in tackling any new problem.

If there is nevertheless a principle that guides him, it is the ideal of absolute usefulness rather than abstract beauty, or historic association. Keenly sensitive to the qualities of materials, he designs in their terms not because of acquired theories, but because common sense commands it. A chair is made to be sat on ; it should be so constructed

that it suits the proportions of the human body and is capable of bearing its weight. Carved ornament in no way adds to comfort, but harbours the dust, even when it is not positively uncomfortable; it should be dispensed with. On the other hand natural wood is through its colour grain and so-called "figure" delightful to the eye, it needs no carving to make it more so. If additional ornamentation is desired, Brangwyn would employ it only in order to enhance its natural beauty and to emphasise its structural form or usefulness. Thus a simple panel in gesso, or an inlay of ebony, ivory or metal, or a decorative handle or hinge is all the ornamentation he would permit in such cases.

We have already noted that Brangwyn relies on a predominance of vertical and horizontal lines in the composition of his decorative paintings. The intersection of these lines, necessarily at right angles, unite the picture with the fundamental construction of wall and floor, and generally also ceiling. Curves, excepting in ceilings, and obliqueness he avoids as much as possible.

The same peculiarity characterises his designs for interior architecture and furniture. He does, it is true, make use of curves, for example in the arms of chairs, and also in his metal work, but in the former case it is done out of regard for comfort and in the latter out of regard for the material, the curve being the natural form of hammered metal. In his designs for carpets and tapestry again the same respect for appropriateness guides his hand, the same desire to avoid doing violence to the nature of the materials.

If, then, absolute and relative usefulness are the first means by which Brangwyn produces Beauty, his second means are of no lesser importance. The co-ordination of parts and their subordination to the whole; in other words a clear realisation of the æsthetic unit in his equally emphatic aim.







As a matter of fact nearly all Brangwyn's "applied art" is to be regarded, together with his decorations, as component parts of complete schemes of decoration. His chairs, tables, carpets, lampshades or what not, are not things to be judged on their own merits alone, but as subservient to complete decorative syntheses and therefore in conjunction not only with one another but with the walls and the paintings on the walls.

By far the greater number of his works of applied art owe their origin to such complete schemes of decoration. Nevertheless he has also furnished independent designs for all manner of things, from soup plates and lampshades to fans and bedspreads.

In the following, consideration is given to individual schemes and objects under the separate heading of the craft to which they belong.

#### ROOMS AND FURNITURE.

The earliest complete scheme of Room decoration was designed by Brangwyn in 1900 for a house in Kensington. It has often been described, but as it has since been sold and removed, a short description may here suffice.

The problem was to evolve a scheme suitable for a bedroom. True to the Artist's principle of absolute and relative usefulness he selected a combination of restful grey. The woodwork was therefore made of cherrywood unpolished but slightly waxed. This wood has a tender purplish greyness, and this tint supplied the best motif. The walls of the room were divided horizontally by a skirting board of this wood and a picture frieze occupying about one-fifth of their height, bordered by rails of cherry-wood. The wall spaces, filled with a dove grey paper, were further divided vertically by flat parallel bands of the same wood, each decorated in its centre with a picture representing the months, whilst the subject of the frieze was an allegory of the seasons. The doors of the room and wall cupboard were

designed in the same style as the pilasters. The bedstead repeats the scheme of the architecture : that is to say it is made of the same wood, the design is likewise a series of flat panels decorated at the foot end by a frieze-like painting, whilst the head end is connected architecturally with the wall itself in such a manner that the vertical wall panels link it with the frieze. The chairs, covered with antelope skin, and a bedroom table follow out the architectural decorative scheme exactly. The lines are all rectangular, the only curve appearing in the arms of one of the chairs, and square decorative panels are set into the chairbacks, the decoration harmonising with the frieze pattern of the bedstead and the square filling of the table.

The overmantel, decorated with a frieze, is really a "nest" of cupboards with a recessed mirror in the centre.

Absolute usefulness in this scheme is represented by the harmonious subordination in design and colour of every single part to the æsthetic unit—namely a room for rest and quiet. Relative usefulness is served by the little devices such as the cupboards in the mantelpiece and a similar device on the head of the bed.

Whistler's principle, it will be seen, is here much further developed ; the pictorial decoration does not dominate the scheme, but forms part of it, and is to be judged as such only.

The whole room with all its contents had been carefully thought out, even to the bare parquet floor, upon which a few rugs were laid. Thus in every respect utility and health was considered first, and the decorations were not so much super-additions to as intensifications of utility. The intention was to produce a quiet, nerve soothing atmosphere.

Twenty or thirty years ago such a conception of utility was, in spite of Morris' theoretical precepts, which he himself would not appear to have carried out very successfully in practice,



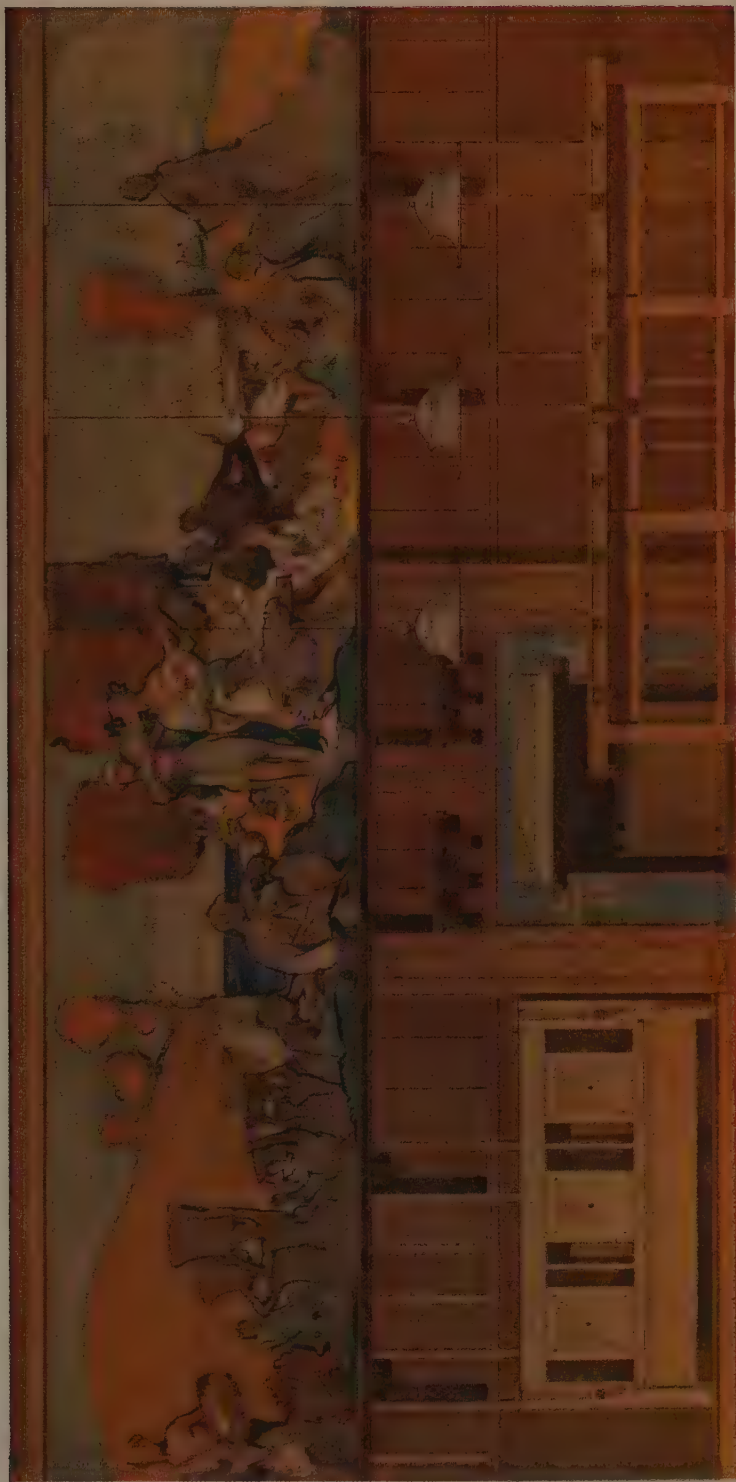
something new. There was, as we already have had occasion to note, very little of Morris' but a good deal of Whistler's decorative principle in Brangwyn's practice, though I very much doubt whether either of them would have admitted this. At all events, Brangwyn's approach to the applied arts was, and still is, that of the painter rather than that of the craftsman, of the mind that views the room as an æsthetic unit, rather than as a box for a number of useful or beautiful articles.

In corroboration of this I will enumerate in the following a few decorative schemes, such as Brangwyn designed for commercial firms. They are not arranged in any order, but as I noted them when looking through his portfolios.

1. Room of the first Venice Exhibition already described.
2. A drawing room : blue grey walls with a gesso frieze of female figures and peacocks in black oxydised silver and gold.
3. A simple scheme for a drawing room : pale blue walls ; light natural colour woodwork. The walls divided by flat pilasters supporting a frieze of flower baskets suspended from "swags" of foliage.
4. Decoration for a music room : crimson or gold, the broad frieze decorated at intervals by shafts supporting Caryatides with musical instruments in gilt low relief gesso.
5. Scheme for a drawing room : white wood, with pale buff coloured panels set in a darker frame-work, so that the styles and rails



- form a check pattern of squares. The mantelpiece a peacock design in blue tiles, with a picture panel surmounting the shelves.
6. A wall decoration : the walls tinted a deep blue fading towards the skirting board into pale grey-blue : strings of gold grapes suspended from black trellis in lieu of frieze.
7. A billiard room scheme : This was carried out by Messrs. Thurston.



SCHEME FOR A BILLIARD ROOM DECORATION.  
MADE FOR MESSRS. THURSTON.









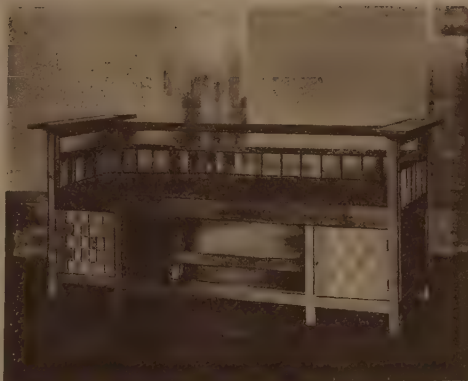
SCHEME IN BLACK AND GOLD FOR A ROOM DECORATION.

A deep pictorial frieze occupying nearly one-half of the wall. The lower half panelled with fumed oak with the simplest design of recessed oblong panels, and alcoves (for whiskey glasses, etc.) in its upper section. The mantlepice, decorated with blue tiles and an oxidised copper hood, is a range of shelves and cabinets. The two long cabinets flanking the fireplace intended to house the billiard cues, thus forming an integral part of the interior architecture. A rush-seated settle with three rush backs is a very simple construction of horizontal and vertical members, strictly in keeping with the panelling. The most striking innovation is the construction of the billiard table. Here we have, in lieu of the heavy, usually bulging, but small-waisted billiard table-legs, eight simple square uprights, connected by a narrow rail, joined vertically by three narrow uprights in each division. This innovation is based on the consideration that the bulging legs interfere with the comfort of the player, without in any way contributing to strength, since each leg is only as strong as its thinnest part. The table was decorated in harmony with the cue cabinets and mantel shelf with a pattern of inlaid ebony and ivory, whilst lampshades of pierced copper completed the decorative ensemble.

This, as well as the other schemes just enumerated, belong pictorially to what one may call his early manner. The pictorial decoration is, in the main, as in the Bing and Venice panels, a harmony of gold-greys and blue, the latter colour predominating.

In his more recent work his colouring is in a much stronger and more positive key. This applies particularly to a Billiard Room at Horton House, Northampton.

This room measures about twenty-four by thirty feet and is about sixteen feet high. It is panelled quite simply in oak up to the height of nine feet leaving a space for the painted frieze of about six-and-a-half feet. At one of the narrow walls is an "inglenook"







fireplace made up of pieces of old carved Italian walnut. For this room Brangwyn designed a ceiling with an oblong skylight, consisting of a series of square glass panels so arranged that twelve of the twenty-seven smaller centre panels each contain an opalescent bowl concealing an electric light. The lamps which illuminate the billiard table are shaded by metal shades designed also by the artist, executed in pierced and oxydised copper, and suspended from the bowl lights by thirty-two cords decorated with beads. The effect at night time is, I am told, particularly beautiful; in daylight the mass of cords, as well as the proportion of the room, make it impossible to enjoy an undisturbed view of the very gaily painted frieze representing Venetian life. Its predominant scheme is Brangwyn's favourite: cool blues accented by patches of brilliant orange

reds, with here and there a strong emerald green note. But Brangwyn has also indulged in curious combinations of other colours, as, for instance, a salmon pink and an ochre yellow, or a combination of crimson and a scarlet.

The scheme as a whole is hardly sufficiently continuous. Though, of course, there is no break in the design so far as subject matter and scale of the figures is concerned, the decoration breaks up into a series of groups rather than a single unit. Some of these groups are, however, masterly, and the whole is permeated with a quick sense of humour which finds its culmination in the group of two men bearing a baby in a fish basket on the entrance wall. This part of the frieze is the last one finished, and is altogether delightful. It represents a fish market. The adjoining long wall is also a quay of a canal, with a Rialto-like bridge





BILLIARD ROOM DECORATION, HORTON HOUSE, NORTHAMPTON



in the background, and fruit and vegetable porters fetching and carrying sacks of potatoes, chests of tea, crates of bananas, pumpkins and other fruit. The narrow wall opposite the fish market represents scenes from Venetian life. Men in a tavern, women with washing. The second long wall represents men and women drinking, singing, playing guitars.

I must stray for a moment from my ground to mention two pictures, also at Horton House, which are not mural decorations. The curious, interesting and humorous "Prodigal Son" surrounded by suckling pigs, painted in a pale bluish pink and dark green altogether different from that usually associated with an artist, and the beautiful early rich and mellow "Cider-press" which alone would secure to its author a place amongst the great masters.

Returning to the subject of furniture, we must note the fact that Brangwyn designed many complete schemes but of simpler nature for friends, such as the Villa of Mr. Kitson at Taormina, and for commercial firms; the latter have the structural simplicity that distinguished the schemes and pieces already described, but their material was cheaper, and the decoration depended not on the beauty of precious woods and inlays, such as shown in the examples here illustrated, but on the application of suitable metal fittings.

Amongst this cheaper kind of furniture of more recent design is a set of arm chairs and a table, which were, together with a carpet, used to furnish the Brangwyn room at the Ghent Exhibition. The illustration (p. 91) explains these designs sufficiently, it only needs to be pointed out that the wood was Circassian ash embellished with small pieces of ebony, whilst the dark inlay of the table consisted of the same wood cut across the grain.

Furniture of this kind, solidly constructed and supremely comfortable, is producible at very small cost, yet modern conditions of trade—quite apart from the disturbance created by the aftermath of the great war—prevent the manufacture of such things: the public that prefers solidity and good construction to lavish ornamentation is still too small to make it worth the manufacturer's while to cater for it. Modern commerce flourishes only on quantity.

Brangwyn loves to invent things of absolute use, quite as much as things of relative—*i.e.*, applied beauty. So, for example, he has been experimenting with furniture that can be taken to pieces and put together again by the housewife who may wish to give it a thorough "scrub"—but the manufacturers would hardly attach a commercial value to such extreme practicality.

Absolute usefulness, however, is the underlying idea of the "Roll" of Honour designed for the Grammar School at Ilkley. This takes the shape of a very simple pulpit, made of oak inlaid with ebony and box wood. The decoration in the upper part consists of a Cross containing in its centre the arms of the school, below inlaid in ebony are the names of pupils killed in the war. The Roll of Honour thus serves not only a useful purpose, but the boys have the names of the fallen as a constant reminder





of sacrifice before them. Associative values have here enhanced the significance of æsthetic values and *vice versa*.

On the other hand, where simplicity and austerity is not essential, Brangwyn's inventive mind is capable of giving to useful furniture even pictorial values without perpetrating the mistake of painted furniture. I am thinking here of a picturesque print cabinet designed by him in Chinese lacquer work. The cabinet is a large case with a number of flat drawers intended as receptacles for prints and drawings. The craftsmanship of this cabinet is sheer joy—the drawers slide, heavily weighted as they are, in and out with perfect ease, and close with hermetic precision; the legs support the whole structure with absolute firmness. The pierced steel escutcheons of the handles tone beautifully with the purplish tone of the slightly polished cherrywood grain. When the Cabinet is closed the doors form one great panel, wrought in coloured and raised *gesso duro*. The subject is entirely fanciful, representing as it does a group of *quasi* mediæval men bringing offerings to an enthroned prince. In the background is a walled city of fantastic architecture, with a church upon a cliff. I do not know what it all means, or why the two flamingos in the foreground should appear to be receiving the homage due to the king—but that does not matter. The effect is extraordinarily decorative. The execution is based on Chinese panels, on which, however, the raised design is carved out of wood and not, as here, cut in gesso.

Eastern design has altogether had a great influence on Brangwyn's applied art, just as it had on Whistler's, but whilst it induced the latter artist to destroy architectural features with a pictorial pattern, and therein to follow the bad neo-Gothic taste of covering everything with a pattern of some kind, it has taught Brangwyn the value of concentrated accents on



plain spaces. This elaborately decorated Print Cabinet is an exception to his usual severity of design and ornamentation.

Another exception is a screen design for Mr. Rowley's coloured and inlaid woodwork. It was actually carried out but is, in its finished form, not as



FRONT PANEL OF A PRINT  
CABINET. CARVED GESSO.









successful as it might have been if the colours had remained in a simpler and quieter range.

Before leaving the woodwork of the artist an interesting experiment made by Sir Richard Paget must find mention. This gentleman employed wounded soldiers who had had no previous training in the making of carved and coloured woodwork. The process, inspired by Chinese examples, is his own invention. The design was carved, or rather gouged out of flat panels, as it were, in *niello* the sunk spaces being filled with wax-colours. For this purpose Brangwyn designed a sevenfold screen, illustrated here. The finished panels are not entirely, or at least, not all equally successful. The Artist's imagination, profuseness, and summary manner of drawing made, it must be confessed, a rather severe demand upon the executive skill of men who had to invent their technique as they went along, so to speak. In this they showed extraordinary sensibility, even succeeding in rendering some of the qualities of Brangwyn's pastel drawing by manipulation of the gouge. It is, however, the wax colouring material which proved difficult, hence the colour-effect is not always good. Nevertheless it seems a great pity that this process, outwardly showing some resemblance to the carved gesso of the print cabinet, has not been further developed. Its results are practically permanent. One can imagine a room carried out in such carved and coloured panelling looking very beautiful. (See pages 218 and 219.)

#### CARPETS AND TAPESTRIES.

There is from the designer's point of view this affinity between carpet and tapestry, they are both textile fabrics in which the design is based on groundwork of threads which cross each other at right angles, so that continuous lines are possible only in one of two directions. If there is this similarity there is, however, also a fundamental difference. The carpet *qua* floor-covering presents a horizontal surface to the down-looking eye. The tapestry *qua* wall-covering on the other hand presents a vertical surface to the up-looking eye of the spectator. In other words, to satisfy the eye the carpet must express horizontality, the tapestry verticality; the former must lie down with the floor, the latter must stand up with the wall. This is one principle of textile design. The other principle affects the nature of the design itself. A woven fabric cannot express curves otherwise than by stepped progression. The curve is against its very nature. Now there is



little doubt that the old tapestry designers aimed at pictorial effects: the tapestry to them was a woven painting. Also however, the Gothic craftsman was more interested in the subject than in the æsthetic balance of composition. His *pictorial* aims were not primarily concerned with æsthetic values, which latter consequently result in his case from the natural use of woof and warp, of thread and loom, and from the dyes at his disposal.

The Renaissance, with the curve as the principal quality of its design, had to do violence to the weaver's craft, and eventually tapestries, such as the Gobelins' failed in their purpose æsthetically, exactly in the degree in which they became more perfect in their realistic and plastic effects.

The carpet came, as a floor-covering, only late into the art of Europe, the truly European carpet therefore is really a piece of tapestry laid on the floor. But the most popular and general design for floor covering is



Oriental. It is also æsthetically the most satisfactory. It would be foolish to credit the Oriental with a greater æsthetic sense on that account. The extraordinary æsthetic efficiency of Oriental carpet design is due to a concatenation of circumstances which prevented the designer from developing the European love of naturalism and sense of plastic values. The Oriental design delights us merely as a pattern, because to the Oriental the elements of design, even though they had been originally, without a doubt, representational, were symbols but not imitations of things. He had therefore no difficulty in arranging his symbols in a traditionally æsthetic order without in any way diminishing their significance; whilst the European is all the time hampered by his anxiety to preserve some sort of a naturalistic order. In Oriental design we discern the preservation of geometric rather than naturalistic or organic forms, and it is these inorganic forms which make such carpets so eminently successful as floor coverings. As the carpet lies

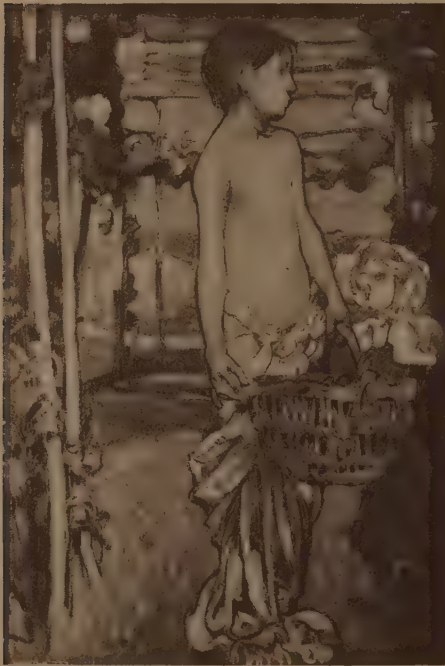




perfectly flat on an artificially levelled horizontal plane, the mind's eye associates inorganic inertia, but no kind of organic movement with it. Any easily recognisable representation of natural organic forms has a disturbing influence. All the eye demands is a sense of balance, and in so far as the natural shape of a textile is regular, also a sense of symmetry. These two principles are nearly always carefully respected by the Oriental designer. When the carpets were intended for floor coverings—which of course was not always the case—they take the form of a rectangular "field" surrounded by a containing and continuous border. In this field, or in the design of the whole fabric, the eye registers certain salient points, which we have called points of emphasis. The four principal points of emphasis are the four corners, which are generally distinguished by an ornamental variation. The fifth point of emphasis is the carpet centre. The four points next in importance are the centres of the long and the short sides, and so on in

mathematical progression, diminishing in emphatic value. It is this geometric arrangement, plus the geometric or almost inorganic pattern, and lastly the excellent harmonisation of colours, which make the Oriental manner of design both absolutely and relatively superior to the European. The Oriental carpets which were interwoven for "prayer purposes" or *vertical* use approach a little nearer to representation, because they generally show a representation of the "Mirab" (the Prayer Niche) or in later times of flowers and animals seen in vertical perspective.

It is more difficult to establish a law for the æsthetic design of vertical wall hangings. The vertical position signifies to the eye the immanence of an upholding principle, which is the more readily associated with

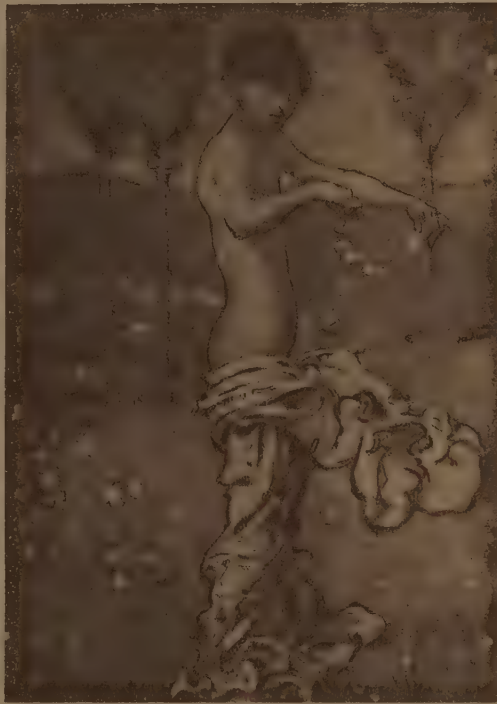


movement when the surface of the loosely hung fabric undulates. There is a nearer approach to life, there is more living force in verticality than in horizontality always. Consequently the designer is more easily tempted to imitate "nature." Where geometricity is *natural* in floor ornamentation, it is *artificial* in wall ornamentation, especially when the material itself is of organic origin. There is no doubt therefore that *pictorial* tapestry is a perfectly legitimate form of wall covering. But whilst the Tapestry, more particularly when it is tautly stretched, offers the designer more chance for "naturalistic" effects, at the same time the nature of the fabric prevents the imitation of nature's curves, except at very great expense of time and labour and the exertion of a great deal of ingenuity, and even then the effect is in no way comparable with the painted panel or canvas. In the free wall hanging, however, the curve, *i.e.*, the deviation from the horizontal and the dominant vertical, is disagreeable, because the vertical folds disintegrate all oblique lines.

All these considerations, not to mention the question of colour, present themselves to the true artist's mind intuitively, whilst the craftsman and the traditionalist is likely to overlook them.

It so happens that Brangwyn made a magnificent design for a tapestry and quite a number of designs for carpets at a time when the professional designers and craftsmen were struggling to produce textiles either in imitation of old tapestries, Gobelins and Oriental carpets, *i.e.*, attempting realistic effects.

It seems almost inexplicable how an artist, influenced from infancy by tradition—Brangwyn's father was steeped in ecclesiastical



art, and he himself was trained under William Morris—and surrounded by contemporaries full of the naturalistic and realistic aims of Impressionism, should have produced such a remarkable design for a Tapestry as “Le Roi au Chantier,” which Brangwyn made for Mr. Bing. The Cartoon is now in Leeds, darkened by smoke and grime, all its beauty of colour faded, so that one can only guess at the richness of the effect of its deep blues, deep reds, oranges and greys. The whole conception so impressed the French Minister of Art, at the time, that he said he would have engaged Brangwyn on the spot for the Gobelins and given him enough work to last him a lifetime—if Brangwyn had been a Frenchman.

I do not know what purpose or significance attaches to this “King in the Shipyard” and it is regrettable that I cannot state what has become of the portion of this design which was actually carried out in tapestry. But tapestry weaving is a costly affair—they say that it takes a Gobelin worker three hundred days to produce a square yard—and it is therefore





not to be wondered at that the cartoon, measuring, as it does, eleven feet eight inches by twelve feet nine inches, was never completely executed. The composition is traditional only in its border. The field shows the Oriental splendour of Brangwyn's paintings of the period, the three shields in the foreground give it something of a *Gothic* effect which is further suggested by the great number of profiles; the ensemble, however, is entirely original. Brangwyn's innate sympathy with the material and the requirements of the craft is shown in the predominance of vertical and horizontal lines and the almost entire absence of sweeping curves. The Tapestry, if carried out—it is, so it seems to me, not yet too late—would have, one may safely say, a magnificently congruous and decorative effect.

As a designer of carpets, Brangwyn appears in a totally different light, because he has a chameleon-like capacity of adapting his talent to the requirements of the material upon which he sets his mind.

It is true that, as he himself owns, he has made some mistakes in this branch of design. There is, for example, a pattern for a rug derived mainly from a cornfield *motif*—sheaves of corn, stubble and sickle—all clearly recognisable and therefore unsatisfactory. One may conceivably tread a pile carpet as if it were a stubble field, but the eye rejects both sheaves and sickle vicariously because to tread upon sheaves of corn, or bunches of flowers for that matter, is as repugnant to our minds as treading upon sickles is dangerous to our feet. Much more satisfactory is the design for a rug in which one discerns the echo of Arabic script motives on the border, whilst the centre is reminiscent of an Hispano-Moorish textile pattern, a pattern which he has, curiously enough, used very successfully, for his intarsia on table tops.





An excellent carpet, embodying trellis and a very abstract grape-leaf-and-tendril *motif*, which he also designed for Monsieur Bing, created a great deal of attention on the Continent, where artists were endeavouring to introduce a new note into the art of carpet designing. The peculiar excellence of Brangwyn's carpets was, however, not only the abstract design but the excellent colour. This vine-motif carpet, resembling a seventeenth century Persian rug in colour, had a dark blue field, a buff border, whilst the leaves, grapes, stems and tendrils represented a harmony of buffs, browns, rust reds and orange into which a pale green and pink was introduced by way of contrast. It is interesting to note that the artist does not entirely approve of this design because, as he points out, "one does not tread on grapes and trellis work." It seems to me, however, that in this case representation is sufficiently abstract to make that objection invalid.



If there is any criticism to be made, I should say it is this: that the points of emphasis, particularly those in the four corners, are not symmetrical.

This Carpet was manufactured in France, and has not faded.

In the Ghent exhibition room another carpet of Brangwyn's was shown. It was much more symmetrical, as may be seen from the illustration. Its dominant colours were blues, buffs and pale greens, and one hundred replicas were actually produced in England and sold at a ridiculously low figure.

Unfortunately the dyes were not so good, and the colours have faded.



A CARPET DESIGNED BY FRANK BRANGWYN.





## METAL WORK.

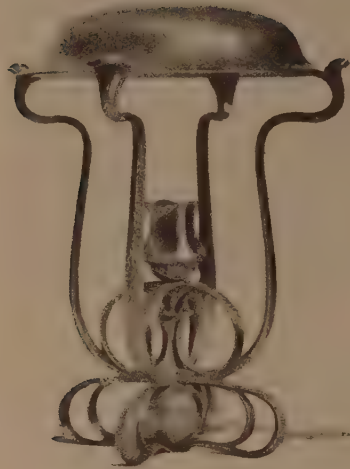
If the rectangle is the foundation of tapestry design, the curve seems to be the *natural* design for wrought metal. The more rectilinear, the sharper the edges of metal things, the more hopeless and unsympathetic do they appear to the eye. Cast steel and cast iron, which can easily be fashioned in any shape, and which therefore may as readily take the form of the perfect cube or the perfect sphere, at the same time seem devoid of any semblance of life—of “will,” as Schopenhauer would call it.

On the other hand wrought and hammered metal retain their vitality even to the empirical eye. That this should be so is due precisely to the absence of that mathematical precision which is possible in metal work, and the prevalence of curves and undulations even where a straight edge is more or less intended.

Brangwyn, who has the right intuition in regard to the crafts which he himself does not practice, has furnished designs for metal work in which the curve plays its justly predominant part. For the furniture and the rooms which were made to his designs he has, with the artist's care for the *minima*, supplied drawings of all manner of fittings from door handles to electric fittings, from hinges to standard and pendant lamps. In all these designs the effect







depends on curvilinear ornament, in which sometimes a plant motif, at others a purely geometrical motif may be discerned. It is to be noted that most of these devices were carried out at a time when designers were inclined to experiment in naturalistic ornament, if indeed they did not prefer to reiterate and to adapt traditional forms. Brangwyn has kept clear of both. His designs are individual, but they all clearly express the material and the manner in which it was wrought, and in every case serve not only a utilitarian purpose but are always considered, æsthetically, as points of decorative emphasis both as regards design and colour. Thus the

oxydised silver handles for the luxurious cherry-wood furniture gives a touch of cool contrast to the soft warmth of the purplish wood.

For the cheaper furniture, designed for the ordinary trade of commercial firms, the metal work was polished in oxydised copper, in hammered steel and brass.

One is, however, inclined to criticise this lavish use of thin metal, especially in case of commercially produced furniture, where such fittings tend to become rhetorical, *i.e.*, tinny, always a danger in repoussé work. The heavy hinges of Gothic doors and chest, however ornamental they were in effect, were nevertheless not so for purely decorative reasons; they had to bear the weight of heavy wood and moreover helped to strengthen it. Brangwyn used his metal work from the *pictorial* rather than the practical point of view, and indeed once made a quaint design for the decoration of a fire place—two wingless cupids, blowing the fire in the hearth. They were intended to be made in wrought steel, which would harmonise with the blue tiles of the fireplace. The scheme never materialised, nor can one anticipate its success with any confidence.

The artist was on much surer ground with his design for maces, one of which was carried out for the University of Leeds. The illustration explains the design. It was made in silver embellished with enamel. The effect,



for all its richness and sumptuousness in colour, is in type midway between Gothic fancy and Classic simplicity. What must astonish the sculptor, or the silversmith is the fact that a man trained as a painter should be able to design successfully for a craft which, as he no doubt would say, requires a special training. At the present moment Brangwyn is astonishing architects for very similar reasons.



JEWELRY, EMBROIDERY AND FANS.

There is something incongruous in the association of our artist's name with such things as Jewelry, Embroidery and Fans. Brangwyn seems the last artist in the world to design things for the use or adornment of women. He, however, would not be he if the problem of designing, even for purposes so alien to his temperament, did not attract him. Seeing him at work upon a canvas as big as a house, painting human figures twenty feet high, it seems incredible that his hand should ever have delighted in the drawing of rings and pendants or even fans.

His jewelry designs were produced as a protest against the machine-made work which was turned out thirty years ago, and which, though still on the market, is now rivalled by "hand made" stuff, perhaps not much less objectionable. One knows, of course, that æsthetic enthusiasts and reformers of taste look upon the *hand* as intrinsically virtuous and on the *machine* as a symbol and agent of vice. I am, however, not at all sure that a thing made *badly* by the hand is not more vicious than a thing made *well* by machinery. At all events the craze for handicraft is responsible for a lot of work for which there is in reality neither justification nor excuse. Brangwyn himself

objects not only to the machine-made article and the things made by an unskilled or fumbling hand, but also to the habit that women have of wearing precious stones merely on account of their market value, or semi-precious and even valueless stones and materials only for the sake of their colour. It must be admitted that of all precious stones the most valuable—diamonds—are the least beautiful. Their flashes reek of ostentation, which latter is an æsthetic offence of the first order, and if pearls, emeralds, sapphires and the like are less offensive, they are only seen at their best either singly, or sufficiently small in size to form the integral part of a pattern ; that is to say the æsthetic value must be in the design, not in the material. As regards the use of semi-precious stones or other materials of mineral or animal origin : Brangwyn would have such things only sanctioned if they are shaped to form part of a carefully-considered and wrought whole. Brangwyn's designs for jewelry are therefore distinguished by the simplicity of form and the opportunity they give for the display of beautiful colour.

A similar simplicity prevails in the artist's designs for embroidery, in which he has followed Oriental traditions.

Brangwyn has also designed fans, and if these designs coming from his hand cannot well fail to be strong in composition and pleasing in colour, it is hardly to be expected that his massive and monumental manner—the result of his temperament—lends itself to such purpose. It is curious that such flimsy and delicate things as fans are never successfully designed by the women themselves : only men such as Conder seem to have succeeded, perhaps because they understand the psychological desiderata of woman's most effective weapon of attack—or so at least it used to be ; those times are past, with the *fin de Siècle* : And though Brangwyn was in them, he was never really of them.





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